Grant Caldwell was born in Melbourne in 1947. He has been writing poetry and prose for 30 years. This is his seventh book, his fifth collection of poetry. His last book You Know What I Mean was nominated for the Age Book Of the Year Award. He has received two Australia Council Fellowships and two Vicarts grants. He has lived in London, Morocco, Ibiza and Sydney. Presently he lives in Melbourne. He has been teaching writing part time at The School of Creative Arts, Melbourne University since 1995; he also teaches at Holmesglen TAFE.
Also by Grant Caldwell

The Screaming Frog That Ralph Ate
The Bells of Mr Whippy
The Nun Wore Sunglasses
The Revolt of the Coats (Stories)
Malabata (Novel)
The Life of a Pet Dog
You Know What I Mean

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Once a poet wakes up, he is stupid, I mean intelligent.

‘Where am I?’ he asks.

Jean Cocteau
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dreaming of robert de niro

robert de niro and I are in a café
he’s showing me how to punch holes in the wall
and I’m doing okay –
we’ve already punched
a few holes in the wall.
and then there are five other men
in the dark light
talking to him
but looking at me
from under their hats.
I’ve got my silver pistol out
wrapped in the silk handkerchief in my lap
and one of the men with the hats
aims his gun at me
and fires
but I beat him to the draw
shooting him dead
and the other one
against the wall
I shoot him too
before he can fire.
the other men call a halt to things then –
they say I’m okay
and robert de niro says
he told them I was okay
and they say: yair, well,
we just had to find out for ourselves.
then they’re gone
and robert de niro and I
punch a few more holes in the wall.
dreaming of robert de niro

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and they say: yair, well,
we just had to find out for ourselves.
then they’re gone
and robert de niro and I
punch a few more holes in the wall.
cell of flowers

twenty years ago
painting a landscape
in the yard
a guard came
and stood watching
over my shoulder
for
a
long
time.
how do you do this? he said.
I make it up in my head, I told him.
and that night
a bunch of flowers
came flying through the cell window
and landed on my bed.
so I painted them.
and every time I look at the painting now
I wonder
if he’s
still
in there.

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a bunch of flowers
came flying through the cell window
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so I painted them.
and every time I look at the painting now
I wonder
if he’s
still
in there.
and the high windows

some of the more lively ones
would scrape match heads
into a tight ball of paper
and roll it in a cigarette
and offer it to
one of the slow thinkers
who never had any cigarettes
and who took it with pleasure
thinking their fortunes
had suddenly changed
and everyone would watch them
as they smoked it
until it exploded in their face
and everyone would crack up laughing.
then we would all
go back to
staring at the walls
and the high windows.

and the high windows

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would scrape match heads
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then we would all
go back to
staring at the walls
and the high windows.
falling through space

If there was no such thing as wind and you heard the first one
trees talking like animals and children breaking zen like an egg
like the hard-boiled hormone-pumped west
sinking in the sun

love a word like suck of forever the kiss you’re told is happiness
money in the bank congrats the spotlight chasing like a child like a
butterfly the family cut to pieces searching release finding torpor
chairs falling through space

the need for contact like irrational depression like the peripheral
spirit of the poem like the beloved is always immaculate like don’t
look in mirrors tripping sugar and salt are drugs like rope and
everyone thinks they can see

how many twitches will be odd next century how many gone birds
how many spikes up the arse of enemies when rain burns flesh
progress will I still be twitching in step.

falling through space

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how many twitches will be odd next century how many gone birds
how many spikes up the arse of enemies when rain burns flesh
progress will I still be twitching in step.
cognisance

you notice you’re feeling good
you feel so good about this
you want it to last forever –
and it goes away;
you notice you’re feeling bad
you feel so bad about this
you want it to stop –
and it doesn’t.

you notice you’re feeling good
you feel so good about this
you want it to last forever –
and it goes away;
you notice you’re feeling bad
you feel so bad about this
you want it to stop –
and it doesn’t.
wake-up (call)

pain like the night (i.e. insomnia
the burglar alarm that won’t stop
   (like yr brain
all the negative things you can
think of
stop you drifting in yr bed
the ozone wake-up (call
chernobyl/exon/chile/nicaragua/vietnam, hello!

everything (except everything
stops (eventually
even the burglar alarm
the relief of silence
all the positive things you can
think of
her/him/them
the perseverance of ants
water
the sky
a shady tree in a heatwave
the sun

is shooting us
and we don’t even know it
payback
   (day/night

negative is in the eye
   of the beholder (like a log
so much self- hurt
i’m really a genius (for example
   (van gogh/kafka/dickinson/cervantes
who wants to be a millionaire?
I don’t
‘cause all I want is
   you (if only it was true
what about when
you dies or
runs away with the gas man/woman
I took a lottery ticket
but I can’t throw it away
(it’s stuck to my psyche
you want everyone to envy you
why?

if everyone was as smart as
what'sisname
there’d be peace
we could have just war
on the level
(playing fields
you know
osama bin laden means
“a bird in the hand”
(all desire is violence
power kills
absolute power
kills absolutely
(except everything

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you dies or
runs away with the gas man/woman
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osama bin laden means
“a bird in the hand”
(all desire is violence
power kills
absolute power
kills absolutely
(except everything
when you get into it

when you get into it
it takes you over
so much
you’re not aware of it
it envelopes you
until you and it are indistinguishable
and you don’t know what it is
you don’t know who or where you are
you don’t even know you don’t know these things
even time no longer seems to exist
although there is a kind of movement
and everything is a song
bringing tears to your eyes
you feel them slip down your cheeks
you taste their saltiness in the corners of your mouth
and you think of the sea
and suddenly there’s a breeze
and you’re aware of yourself
and how you can feel these things
and everyone is staring at you
and all you can remember
is all you ever wanted.
hardly able to focus

the monkey is meditating
on the pointlessness of squares
the visitors take snapshots of their expectations
the monkey articulates form and emptiness
the visitors are enthralled at the sounds
their laughter like the call of birds
echoes around the cage
the monkey mistakes it
for the phantoms of its tribe
it rushes after them among
the broken trees and rocks
the visitors are screaming with laughter
they point their cameras
hardly able to focus.

hardly able to focus

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it rushes after them among
the broken trees and rocks
the visitors are screaming with laughter
they point their cameras
hardly able to focus.
the passive smoker
drew back

...  

materialism:
loss and gain had an argument –
gain lost

...  

when one door closes
so does another one

...  

wanting drugs
is not wanting
to want anything
phantom pains

the phantom pains
in your missing legs
grow each day
you reflect
the unshaven face
of your persona
you take the cutthroat razor
your father left you
and sharpen it on the strop
he once belted you with
(for your own good)
you gaze out of the window of your flat
at the windows of other flats;
you hear the midday show
on the woman-next-door’s t.v.;
you smell boiled cabbage and fried liver
coming from the old man’s kitchen
across the hall;
you hear the scream of a child somewhere,
and a bird flies past your window –
it was just at the moment you looked there –
a blackbird you’re sure –
and you recall its song
you once listened to
in your mother’s garden –
you remember the shrubs and the fruit trees,
how you fell out of the pear tree
and broke your arm
how your mother fussed over you
and you didn’t have to go to school for a week
how you played wounded soldiers with yourself
in the backyard
and listened through the fence like a spy
to the man and women next door
shouting at each other

you look out of the window again
hoping to see another bird.
the fridge purrs
  in the kitchen corner
  full of food and drink

bushytail possum
  balanced on the water pipe
  in the rain

two men shouting
  in the back lane
  their trunks nose to nose

the shadow
  on the window ledge all day
  — a cat!

tentative as a virgin
  myron in the sea
  the tide takes his clothes
carlights on the window  
   wet leaves like eyes  
       the moon on the road

flies circling crushed snails  
   across the morning pathway  
       a large spider’s web

ice-cream and pancakes  
    honey and banana fritters  
     no future no past

drawing a perfect circle  
     without thought  
         there’s nothing to it

an ant on the page  
     between the lines  
       I stop writing
we take her dog to the beach
to bathe its infected ear
and when she starts complaining
about her boyfriend again
I look away.
look, I say,
pointing at the dog,
he’s found a friend.
a male labrador, ears pricked, it is trying to mount it.
wrong kind, I say laughing.
the labrador stops trying
and instead begins licking her dog’s ear.
look at that! I say.
yes, she nods,
they’ve got a natural antiseptic in their saliva –
the wolves used to do it.
used to? I say.
oh, well, yes,
I suppose they still do,
the ones who’re left.
I hear their numbers are increasing, I say,
coming back, in germany and places.
wolves? she says.
yes.
that’s good, I like wolves.
me too, I say,
and we look at the dogs –
and they’re looking at us.
out the window

you turn out the lights
lean on the window
and look at the park
listening to the silence
smelling the rainwashed leaves and grass
watching the streetlights weep on the road
thinking about the morning
when a young mother crossed the park
with a baby in a pusher
and a boy holding the handle
digging his feet in
screaming at her:
  I don’t want to go, mummy!
  I don’t want to go, mummy!
  I don’t want to go, mummy!
you wanted him to
  let go of the handle
  run away across the park
  throw his satchel at the sky
but of course he didn’t
he held on
he kept screaming
  I don’t want to go, mummy!
  I don’t want to go, mummy!
as they crossed the park
after a while
you come away from the window
and sit in your chair
you light a cigarette
you drop ash on the floor
and watch the smoke escape
out the window

out the window

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and sit in your chair
you light a cigarette
you drop ash on the floor
and watch the smoke escape
out the window
watching braveheart on t.v.

watching braveheart on t.v.
thousands of ants
come marching down the hall
and into the lounge
where they come to a halt.
they stretch back up the hallway out of sight.
the t.v. goes dead.
everything is silent.
we stare at each other across the burgundy carpet.
many of them are holding spears or swords or axes
and some have splashes of warpaint on their faces.
the one at the front has a blue and red face
it raises its sword and yells across the room at me:
YOU CAN TAKE OUR LIVES
BUT YOU’LL NEVER
TAKE
OUR FREEDOM!!!
and the thousands behind it
raise their arms and yell their assent –
and they begin to charge.
the kents

mr. kent prefers driving to walking
mr. kent does not want a brown suit
mr. kent’s parents send skip and laura money every year
mr. kent has been offered a job in new york city
mr. kent has been offered an additional one hundred dollars
mr. kent has been offered three weeks holiday
mr. kent has been offered lunch in new york city
mr. kent likes fish
mr. kent is making a phone call
mr. kent is going to call mrs. kent.

mrs. kent has a lot food in the house
mrs. kent is going to the hairdressers
mrs. kent is going to have her yellow dress cleaned
mrs. kent’s parents send skip and laura money every year
mrs. kent likes salad and potatoes.

the kents have decided to buy a house in new york city
the kents want a home with three extra bedrooms
the kents did not want to buy a car
the kents will be at the theatre tonight
the kents cannot stand the ketchams
the kents have found a house they like.

(Comment: these lines were taken
and rearranged from an
American English textbook)

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and rearranged from an
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mouth

she is looking at my eyes
I am looking at her eyes
she is looking at my mouth
I am looking at her mouth
her mouth moves closer
her mouth touches my mouth
she closes her eyes
I close my eyes
her mouth kisses my mouth
my mouth kisses her mouth
I feel her lips with my lips
I taste her mouth
I feel her teeth
I feel her tongue in my mouth
I feel my tongue in her mouth
I am in my mouth
I am in her mouth
I am her mouth
she is my mouth
everything is expanding.

mouth

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I am looking at her eyes
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I am looking at her mouth
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I taste her mouth
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I feel her tongue in my mouth
I feel my tongue in her mouth
I am in my mouth
I am in her mouth
I am her mouth
she is my mouth
everything is expanding.
black rock 1953

the reef at low tide
rockpools of coral and darkness
a dog barking like toy
a boy screaming
a spear in his foot
a drop of blood where it enters the skin
the smell of seaweed
screeching seagulls hanging in the air
sharp shells and kelp
on the chop of sand
swimming costumes like balloons
the empty boatshed
rank with defecation
the rust caked lock like a disease
empty cans ripening like dead fish
three broken boards in the side wall
dune weeds dancing relief.

black rock 1953

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rockpools of coral and darkness
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a boy screaming
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rank with defecation
the rust caked lock like a disease
empty cans ripening like dead fish
three broken boards in the side wall
dune weeds dancing relief.
the art of gambling

1. carnival of light

yellow on blue light
particles you hear
falling with your eyes
the bubble you inhabit
silence a tick
like an insect
a sprinkler
throwing water or sound
into the light

2. the art of gambling

painting the lightest room you can find
always towards the window
you swallow yourself like a habit
the telescoped brain
breathe out breathe in
the lowest rock looks up
the beauty of a baby’s smile
the way dogs talk
or trees
limitations give shape
the secret of every difference is direction
solitude in the crowd
fana or nirvana
to blow the mind away
(not like hemingway)
the universe is a very very slow one
3. singing in the storm

it takes forever
to appreciate your limitations
the barrier of sky
shoots after a bushfire
green on death
the silence rings
the hatred of history
the sky vomits clouds
raining on faces like flowers

the unsaid hand
curling the long beach
the seabeath gulls hang on
a woman walking the coast
carrying a man’s heart she didn’t ask for
but wanted all the same
the intangibility of emotion
knocks you like an elephant

as if the ambition of ants
the males service the queens
the pleasure of habit
you find your measure of
in confusing spirals
the headless seahorse
waves forward and back
the flux of wings the Bang
still exploding
such a miraculous aberration
and no-one to tell it to

do you remember
the devastation of sandpits
your dismembered heart
everything a prison
weird as fate
singing in the storm
and afterwards the silence

3. singing in the storm

it takes forever
to appreciate your limitations
the barrier of sky
shoots after a bushfire
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do you remember
the devastation of sandpits
your dismembered heart
everything a prison
weird as fate
singing in the storm
and afterwards the silence
4. it’s all about this

it’s all about this
can you see me yet
the catherine wheel, how
long does it last
it’s all about this
a b
driving the obsessions
so much to cram in

5. the mortality of words

running the no return zone
no sugar statue shooting
out of a canon
you can tell the artists
they’ve got no clothes
clowns and hermits
eyes drinking the moon

the mortality of words
falls on the grass
clouds float in the sky.
vacant taxi

sometimes
having a crap
is like being sick out of your bum.
I turn the lights out
so I can look at the night
the clouds are large white heads
the trees are asleep with the dreams of birds
a taxi is coming up the road
I wonder if it’s Death
come to get me –
it gets closer
slows down
I wonder if it
will blow its horn
it’s got an advertising board
on its roof
I can’t read it
it probably says: DEATH
it passes by
someone else
has it coming.

vacant taxi

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I can’t read it
it probably says: DEATH
it passes by
someone else
has it coming.
paradise 1 2 3

1. When someone is in a hole
   people come to the edge
   and yell:
   Hey! Get out of that hole!

2. When someone is in a hole
   and people come to the edge
   and yell down:
   Hey, get out of that hole!
   They don’t get too close
   in case they fall in too.
   This is very reasonable.

3. When someone is in a hole
   and people come to the edge
   and yell:
   Hey! Get out of that hole!
   and the person asks for some rope
   they throw a length down
   and walk away
   shaking their heads.
sonnet of evangelism

outside the newsagent's
I came across
two schoolkids
jumping up and down
and spitting on
one of m's
poetry signs
chalked on the pavement
and I thought about
all the people
who have contributed
to their resentment –
coming back later
I spat on it myself.
quid pro quo

you do this for me
I do that for you
the gap is a shadow
where fences grow
time is a balloon
you search the sky for hands
watching a movie

I’m watching a movie hoping it’ll get better and suddenly I see myself walk into frame glancing at the camera giving me a sly wink, saying: watch this! and I’m walking up to the other actors, shouting: stop all this rubbish! this isn’t how it really is! this is all a lie! when two big arms appear and drag me out of picture. and the movie continues as if nothing occurred but I keep watching to see if I return – but of course I never do.
fifty dollars

she rings to say
she runs an art gallery in south yarra
and her next artist
wants me to read poems at his exhibition launch
and they can pay me
$50
so I say yes
and she invites me to meet
at her gallery/bistro
and when I walk in
there’s no one there but molly meldrum
just molly meldrum at the bar with an espresso
he looks like he’s hiding from something
so I walk down the back
and she’s suddenly there
smiling like a shopkeeper
sitting me down
going me coffee
sitting herself across from me
saying how nice it is to meet me
and I can of course
bring my books and sell them
and it will be a great night
there will be lots of really important
people there and
lots of food and drink
and she’s checked their budget
and they won’t be able to pay me any fee now.
I look at her
I look at molly
I wonder if he has anything to do with this
or is it
the way I went for coffee
the fact I roll my own smokes
my broken teeth
so you got me here

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I look at molly
I wonder if he has anything to do with this
or is it
the way I went for coffee
the fact I roll my own smokes
my broken teeth
so you got me here
on the pretext of a fee, I say
it wasn’t a pretext, she says
I overestimated our budget, I’m sorry
well, I’m sorry too
but I gave up working for nothing
in the nineteenth century.
I stand up to get out of there.
yes, I understand, she says, standing too.
maybe we can do something still
I’ll call you in a few days.
she calls me
two days later
saying they had managed
to juggle things
so I can get my fifty dollars.
and I do the reading
I don’t see molly
or any other really important people
but there’s a big crowd
and they like my poetry
and I drink and eat
as much as I want
I get my fifty dollars
and sell ten books
and sail home to brunswick
in my tram.

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and sell ten books
and sail home to brunswick
in my tram.
walking down the street (I)
walking down the street
I saw a man looking up at the sky.
I looked up at the sky
but I couldn’t see anything,
so I said to him:
what’re you looking at, mate?
and he looked at me, and said:
the sky.
walking down the street (II)

walking down the street
I saw a man looking up at a tree.
I looked up at the tree
but I couldn't see anything,
so I said:
what're you looking at, mate?
he looked at me and said:
that bloody magpie –
it just swooped me!
and he showed me a scratch on his head.
I looked at the tree again
and saw the magpie,
and just as I looked at it,
it flew off.
there it goes, I said.
and the man said: where?
looking in the wrong direction.

walking down the street (II)

walking down the street
I saw a man looking up at a tree.
I looked up at the tree
but I couldn't see anything,
so I said:
what're you looking at, mate?
he looked at me and said:
that bloody magpie –
it just swooped me!
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I looked at the tree again
and saw the magpie,
and just as I looked at it,
it flew off.
there it goes, I said.
and the man said: where?
looking in the wrong direction.
the neverending poem

At Stephen Hawking’s public lecture about the universe being enclosed in an immense bubble an elderly woman interrupted him declaring:
“You’re wrong, young man – the Universe is sitting on the back of a turtle!”
“Ah yes,” he said, “that’s all very well, but what’s the turtle standing on?”
And she replied: “It’s turtles all the way down!”

* * *

Sign in a shop widow:
GIANT SALE

* * *

In Europe in 1990 the production of cars is outstripping the birthrate

* * *

Newspaper headline:
HOLE-IN-HEART BOY KILLED BY FALLING WINDOW

* * *
A newspaper report of a suicide note left by a man who bashed six elderly women to death has two four-letter words dotted out.

* * *

Royal Society for the Blind billboard:
SOME PEOPLE CAN’T SEE THE FOREST …OR THE TREES.

* * *

On television the man who invented heart transplants selling oatmeal cereal.

* * *

Some band names (circa 1990):
Gasoline Kisses
Exploding White Mice
Mutated Noddies
Lubricated Goat
Fresh Rectum
Hot God Vomit

* * *

An elderly woman in the lift saying:
“Sometimes when you get in you can’t find your way out again.”

* * *
The electric blue neon sign on the Electricity Commission Building says:

```
E  CTRICITY
COMMISSION
```
A week later
it just says:
```
COMMISSION
```
And another week later:
```
OMMISSION
```

* * *

Graffiti on the inside fence of a large inner city demolition block in huge white capital letters reaching all the way around the vacant lot:
```
AND THE ETERNAL SILENCE OF INFINITE SPACE REMAINS AS INDIFFERENT TO OUR FATE AS EVER
```
A week later
the words have been painted over with white paint.

* * *

The dummies in the gay clothes shop window look gay

* * *

C.E.M. Joad writing of A.N. Whitehead in his guide to philosophy:
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“That Whitehead’s views are of first-rate importance is almost universally agreed. But there is no sort of agreement as to what they are.”
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T.V. documentary reporter: “In the U.S.A. every weekend 18,000 people shoot water based die pellets at each other in simulated war games. One of the organisers said: ‘From a corporate standpoint it’s a tremendous morale booster. Some people say it only encourages a war-mongering attitude. I say it’s just the opposite: It teaches people a healthy respect for weapons of war...’”

On a large cardboard box in the back of a truck:
THIS BOX CONTAINS
500 HOURS
FREE TIME

Headline in the Daily Mirror:
50 YEARS OF HEADLINES!
A small article in the paper:
BE KIND TO TOADS
Spraying cane toads with chemicals or
bashing them with golf clubs
is cruel, unnecessary and illegal,
according to the RSPCA. Just because
they were ugly and destructive pests
was no excuse for cruelty,
said an RSPCA veterinary adviser, Dr. Cam Day.
The RSPCA recommends placing toads in plastic bags
and freezing them to death.

* * *

Newspaper item under the headline:
MISSIONARY BEATEN
Masked men beat an American Baptist
missionary and killed his 42 year-old
wife yesterday after the couple stopped
their car to help a man lying on the road
30 km from Nairobi, the Kenyan capital.

* * *

A man using a machine
to blow the leaves off his driveway.

* * *

Classifies ad. in MONEY, STOCKS & SHARES Column:
If you can invest $2,000,000
I can make you rich. Phone .........

* * *
Newspaper article:
KRAY IN HOSPITAL
LONDON – Ronnie Kray, one of the notorious gangland twins serving life in prison for murder, is in hospital after a suspected heart attack. The killer, who at 59 smokes 100 cigarettes a day, was in the high security Broadmoor special hospital after collapsing while trying to strangle another prisoner whose whistling got on his nerves.

* * *

“The human race could go extinct, and I for one would not shed any tears.”
Dave Foreman, of the U.S. Deep Ecologist Group Earth First.

* * *

Newspaper article:
“... animal protection groups gathered dead and dying birds from shooting sites where hunters flocked for the opening of the duck season.”

* * *

“Economics is just the method. The goal is to change the human soul.”
Margaret Thatcher

* * * * * *
people you do not know

you catch the tram
you look at the other passengers who you do not know
you get off the tram at the park
you sit under a tree in the sun and watch
  the people you do not know
you walk through the park and look at the houses of
  the people you do not know
  that look onto the park
you walk to the shops and watch
  the people you do not know
  parking their cars and shopping
you buy food and groceries from people you do not know
you catch another tram back to your street with
  people you do not know
you get off the tram and walk to your house
  passing some of your neighbours
  who you do not know
you enter your house and find some letters from
  people you do not know
  – you write not here – please return on them
you make some dinner and turn on the t.v. and watch
  some people you do not know
later you read a book about some people you do not know
and you go to bed and dream about
  some people you do not know
and in the morning when you wake
  you don’t remember anything about them.
another sunday arvo

sharon was playing her guitar
and singing her songs
when marion came in the back door.
she was drunk and angry
and she told us
she’d just had a fight with benny.
she sat down and listened to sharon
who was singing a song called:
*your mechanical devices.*
she sat there a minute
listening and watching –
then she suddenly stood up and shouted:
I’ll give you your mechanical fucking devices!
and she started undoing her false leg.

it was a warm day
and the window was open
and we were three floors up
and when marion had her leg off
she raised it above her head,
hopped across the room
and threw it out the window.
then she sat down
and put her face in her hands
and started to cry.
sharon had stopped singing
and was staring open-mouthed at her.
I went over and put my arm around marion
and told her sharon wasn’t singing that song about her.
she stopped crying then
and I went and looked out the window.
marion said:
I hope it didn’t hit anyone!
and the three of us laughed.
the leg was lying on the pavement
so I went down and got it
and brought it back up.
marion took it from me
and put it on again –
but when she stood on it
it seemed to be broken.
she didn’t seem too fazed about this
so we sat around
and had a smoke
and talked
and listened to sharon
playing her guitar and singing
until benny came over
and we helped marion down the stairs
and into the car
and they drove away.
I asked her if she'd like a drink
and she said okay

as long as I stopped
looking lasciviously at her

so I wore her sunglasses
and sat in the corner

we drank beer and aguardiente
and had a smoke

and she told me her stories
and I told her mine

and now she's asleep
on the spare bed

and I don't want to wake her
because I know she'll leave

so I listen to her breathing
and the night –

the traffic still coming
through the canals of the buildings

a voice in the street
music from a bar

I roll another smoke
drink some more beer

watch the curtains
moving in the breeze
and out the window
the lights of the houses
sweeping up the mountain
at the sky
she wakes
and asks me why I stopped talking
I tell her she’s been asleep
but she doesn’t believe me
she checks her watch
and I ask her to stay
but she smiles
and says she has to go
I walk her to the door
and she kisses me on the cheek
when she’s gone I close the door
and sit on the spare bed
and drink my beer
and look out at the sky
and listen to the night
voices in the street
a car
music from a bar
a dog
barking at the moon.
it circled him at immense speed
three of four times
getting closer
each time
then it attacked
took him 'round the shoulders
they disappeared
then he was up
on his board again
but he only paddled a few times
before it took him again
then the sea was red
and
there was nothing.

it circled him at immense speed
three of four times
getting closer
each time
then it attacked
took him 'round the shoulders
they disappeared
then he was up
on his board again
but he only paddled a few times
before it took him again
then the sea was red
and
there was nothing.
bird cage

when the parakeets fly over shrieking and whistling
the bird calls out to them
and listens calls out
and listens calls
and turns and pecks
the little plastic mirror with the bell on the bottom.
his/her

his love has jellyfish strands
her love has a safety net
his love is a bear hug
her love a game show
his love by rote
her love a door to anywhere
his love a high fence with guard dogs
her love an empty glass
his love a map of the world
her love a photo album
his love smoke and mirrors
her love a fruit bat
his love red
her love black
his love front
her love back.

his/her

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her love has a safety net
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her love an empty glass
his love a map of the world
her love a photo album
his love smoke and mirrors
her love a fruit bat
his love red
her love black
his love front
her love back.
nowhere

I am the sheet of paper
I am the pen
I am the words
I am the desk
I am the room
I am the window
I am the bird in the tree outside the window
I am my coat
I am my hat
I am my keys
I am the front door
I am going out the front door
I am walking down the street
I am going nowhere
I am going there anyway
I am the cars
I am the people
I am the shops
I am meeting a friend in the street
I am her saying how are you, grant?
I am saying I’m fine thanks, how are you?
I am her saying I’m good thanks, what’ve you been up to?
I am saying nothing much
I am her saying me too
I am saying see you later
I am her saying yair, see you soon
I am walking
I am going nowhere
I am my footsteps
I am walking to the park
I am standing in the park against a tree
I am a leaf falling from the tree onto the grass
I am the leaf on the grass
I am the ant walking across the leaf on the grass

nowhere

I am the sheet of paper
I am the pen
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I am the desk
I am the room
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I am the bird in the tree outside the window
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I am walking to the park
I am standing in the park against a tree
I am a leaf falling from the tree onto the grass
I am the leaf on the grass
I am the ant walking across the leaf on the grass
I am the grass
I am walking across the grass
I am going nowhere
I am going there anyway
I won’t know who I am until I get there
like they don’t like us using like because it’s like saying we like accept uncertainty where they like hide from it behind theories and formulas that are like nothing like anything like chill like get real.
chinaski

charles bukowski liked beethoven, mozart, borodin, bartok
– he said bartok didn’t know what he was doing
  which means he knew what he was doing.

he liked hemingway celine john fante
(he said read hemingway once)
his father made him cut the lawns every saturday
and if they weren’t billiardtable smooth
he’d belt him on his boiled legs
  until they bled (the boils).

he said he had a face like a cactus
but the gods gave him balls like pineapples
  and the constitution of a rhinoceros.
he loved cats and alcohol and being alone and sex
  and horse racing
he hated dogs and poetry readings and basketball
  and people who wanted to be writers
he never wanted to be a writer
he never wanted to be anything
but left alone

to do whatever he was doing
while he waited to die.

his epitaph reads:
  don’t try…
ontos farm

the release of the mind
everything still and flying
kookaburras and parrots
the southern cross
the song of castanet frogs
like aborigines chanting
harmonies of the ground
singing the sky
relentless and going for it
then stopping
to listen
just one going on like a clapstick
until it too stops
everything listening to itself
time and eternity
ever and sky
wallabies kissing in a twilight field
grabbing straws in their little hands
ears revolving
eros and oblivion
all this and the joey
and the young shoots of clover
they love so much.

ontos farm

the release of the mind
everything still and flying
kookaburras and parrots
the southern cross
the song of castanet frogs
like aborigines chanting
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wallabies kissing in a twilight field
grabbing straws in their little hands
ears revolving
eros and oblivion
all this and the joey
and the young shoots of clover
they love so much.
kiss the frog

with no more goals
when fate has saved you from stupidity
nothing to prove
no cares
not even a cat
and the sky is not seen
and the demon is always just over the road
you feel your heart
lie down a little
and you know your death
and you distract yourself as best you can
till the last show is gone
and the night
swallows you like a frog.

kiss the frog

with no more goals
when fate has saved you from stupidity
nothing to prove
no cares
not even a cat
and the sky is not seen
and the demon is always just over the road
you feel your heart
lie down a little
and you know your death
and you distract yourself as best you can
till the last show is gone
and the night
swallows you like a frog.
I love your lips
the way
the top one
protrudes
the way
they part
the way
they move
together
the way they say
O
the way they say
ALWAYS
the way they
always
touch
and come
apart.
don’t i know you

you’ll probably learn
that it’s the innocent
who are usually left
wondering why I miss
you and the child in me
making each other laugh
joking that I was your boyfriend
or that I was meeting you
for the first time
the way you refused to humour that one
always made it more delightful for me
things not funny to anyone else
there are reasons beyond us both
why I don’t see you anymore
and that is sad as innocence perhaps
you’ll walk up to me
not so many years from now
and say:
don’t I know you from somewhere?

don’t i know you

you’ll probably learn
that it’s the innocent
who are usually left
wondering why I miss
you and the child in me
making each other laugh
joking that I was your boyfriend
or that I was meeting you
for the first time
the way you refused to humour that one
always made it more delightful for me
things not funny to anyone else
there are reasons beyond us both
why I don’t see you anymore
and that is sad as innocence perhaps
you’ll walk up to me
not so many years from now
and say:
don’t I know you from somewhere?
the first roof I fell through
was at laminex in malvern
where I was the factory painter’s labourer
and trod where I shouldn’t –
gent straight through the perspex
threw out my arms
caught them on the timber beams
scraped the inside of my arms raw –
but it was better than going all the way down
onto the saws and machinery.
I hung there
for five or ten minutes
till they came and lifted me out.
the second roof was in rozelle –
my ex-girlfriend got me a job
helping this crazy builder
renovate a house.
he was in a hurry
trying to keep up with his quote
running me backwards and forwards across the roof
carrying these huge beams.
don’t step on that, he said,
pointing at a square piece over a hole.
and we kept running across it
carrying these huge beams
until, yes,
I stepped on it –
gent straight through,
jammed my leg in the hole
to stop from falling further –
cut a big piece out of my leg.
I gave up roofs after that.
the owner of the house
who sometimes watched us work
told my ex-girlfriend
I was ‘hopeless’.
he was right.
song for the death of birdsong

I have a song that is so profound
I have the song that is sacred
I have this song that is almost gone
I have two songs for the hatred

I am a bird in the hand
I am the bird in the painting
I am this bird that flies like a ghost
I am two birds in the making

tell me a story before you die
tell me the story of going
tell me this story so I can survive
tell me two stories of growing.

I have a song that is so profound
I have the song that is sacred
I have this song that is almost gone
I have two songs for the hatred

I am a bird with no song in my eyes
I am the bird forsaken
I am this bird on a dead branch at night
I am two birds who are taken.

tell me a story before you die
tell me the story of going
tell me this story so I can survive
tell me two stories of going.

I am a bird in the hand
I am the bird in the painting
I am this bird that flies like a ghost
I am two birds in the making.
g’day
howarya?
how was it?
the thing.
uhuh.
yair?
oh yair!
not much.
not much.
othin’.
nah, at home.
whada’ya up to?
who’s there?
just you?
whada’ya doin’?
yair.
yair.
oh well…
mm.
so, are you planning on moving today?
you want to meet me there?
how do I get there?
is…?
yair.
yair.
what…
so, what… whada’ya wana do?
yair.
yair.
yair.
yair.
yair.
yair.
yair.
yair.
just keep that…

ben on the phone

66
so, whada'ya doing? nothing. so... fair enough. so... I’ll come over in about an hour or something. bullshit half an hour! the bus... which... okay. see you then. no, I’m just gunna have a piece of toast ‘n wash m’ face ‘n shit. no. no. what’s that? no, I’ve just never heard you say that before. okay. see you in a while. yair, see ya.
at the tramstop

at the tramstop
listening to two women
tho I could only hear one of them
(the other was turned away from me
more subdued
and the traffic was very loud).

you look so sad, the first woman said
(she was eating a chocolate bar
with green insides).
ah, you must still be in love with him!
don’t worry, it’ll pass.
try not to think about him.
(she bit off another piece of chocolate).

me? she said.

oh, things haven’t been all that great with me either.
he started seeing his ex-girlfriend.
he told me about it –
as if that made it all right!
but it’s funny you know
how these tragedies
(I’m sure she said tragedies)
bring things to a head.

I said to him: I’ve had enough of this bullshit!
I told him if he wanted to see his ex-girlfriend
I was leaving
that night!
I was going!
and I wouldn’t be back!
ha! you should have seen him!
he was devastated!
he caved in!
said he was sorry –
he wouldn’t see his ex.
the tram appeared then
and they got up from the seat.

they’re such shits if you let them be, the woman said.
just don’t see him for about a month.
if he calls, just hang up –
he’ll come around.
the tram stopped
and we got on
(they got in the front
laughing at something
one of them had said)
and it took us away
into the heart of the city.

just don’t see him for about a month.
if he calls, just hang up –
he’ll come around.
the tram stopped
and we got on
(they got in the front
laughing at something
one of them had said)
and it took us away
into the heart of the city.
today

a butterfly
dying on the footpath
I picked it up
and put it in a shady bush –
it looked much happier.

today

a butterfly
dying on the footpath
I picked it up
and put it in a shady bush –
it looked much happier.
the individual rows a boat across the lake

rowing a boat across the lake
you feel strong or you begin to tire
and you see yourself as yourself
you think of the future and of the past
these things form your silhouette

your boat bangs into another boat
and you turn to abuse the rower
but the other boat is empty
and you laugh at yourself
the way only people alone do

you continue to row across the lake
feeling strong or tired
seeing yourself as yourself
thinking of the past and the future
every now and then
turning to see where you’re going.

case
one night

sitting at the bus stop one night
a bunch of skinheads
came across the road.
I sat still.
they came up
and stared at me.
I didn’t move.
I said nothing.
they moved on –
except for one.
he came closer.
he said:
you’re a prick!
whadarya?
you’re a prick!
I said nothing.
I didn’t move.
he said:
you’re a piece of shit!
whadarya?
a piece of shit!
I looked at him.
I said nothing.
I didn’t move.
one of the other skinheads
came back –
she looked at me.
I looked at her.
she said:
he’s alright, jack.
come on,
he’s alright.
jack looked at me –
he’s a piece of shit!
they walked away.

one night

sitting at the bus stop one night
a bunch of skinheads
came across the road.
I sat still.
they came up
and stared at me.
I didn’t move.
I said nothing.
they moved on –
except for one.
he came closer.
he said:
you’re a prick!
whadarya?
you’re a prick!
I said nothing.
I didn’t move.
he said:
you’re a piece of shit!
whadarya?
a piece of shit!
I looked at him.
I said nothing.
I didn’t move.
one of the other skinheads
came back –
she looked at me.
I looked at her.
she said:
he’s alright, jack.
come on,
he’s alright.
jack looked at me –
he’s a piece of shit!
they walked away.
I didn’t say anything.
I sat still.
the bus didn’t come
for a long time.
because she

because no one talks to her
she talks to herself
she talks to herself
because no one talks to her
because she lives on her own
because her family no longer exists
because she only goes down the street once a week
because she has varicose veins
because she wears too much rouge
because her perfume is so strong
because she talks to her cats like they’re her children
because she leaves liver and kidney on the stairs for them
because she’s always asking: “have you seen my tom tom?”
because she says so-and-so robbed her blind
because she believes everything she hears on t.v.
because the neighbours say she’s “getting worse”
because she talks to herself
no one talks to her
no one talks to her
because she talks to herself
insect

the australian assassin bug robs spider webs of cocooned insects

the damsel fly is six inches long lures and captures spiders in their own webs

a colony of army ants numbers three quarters of a million travelling at twenty metres per hour

when bombardier beetles are threatened their rear end explodes with boiling chemicals

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primal song

walking to the dam
        away from the house
        away from the clamour
the grass track
    beaten down in the heat
    the fence beams like old forearms.
you can’t miss it, they said
    go up to the corner
    and follow the fence line.
the silence growing
    crickets
    a fly
    a crow
    something moving in the brittle grass
then the dam
    a brown jewel at the base of the hill
everything so
    quiet
    and hot
took off my clothes
    moved naked
into the water
feet on the slimy bottom
pushing off
floating
the top six inches warm
but below this
very cold
skimming along
just my head up
like a snake
ea kangaroo
came down
towards the bank
stopping
sensing me
weighing its thirst
against the danger
I waited
like a crocodile
but it moved away
I pushed out further
into the middle
feeling for fish in the mind of the dam
feeling the cold of the water
back to the bank
   stepping out on the dry clay
      feeling like an ape
         the first human
             sitting on a log
                 drying in the sun
                     I wanted to stay there forever
or else go back to the house
   just like that
   shouting my nakedness
   leaving my skin
  on the dry mud.

back to the bank
   stepping out on the dry clay
      feeling like an ape
         the first human
             sitting on a log
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