

Underground

<http://underground-writers.org>

Note from the editors...

Issue 3 has landed! This issue really showcases some of the unpublished talent from across Australia. Once again, thanks for those who've submitted to us. Remember, keep those words flowing—we want to hear from you!
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The Family Pet

(Green Fields and Fluffy Bunnies)

Andrew Levett

Pick of the month!

Day after day, the little black rabbit inhabits a stuffy wooden cage, which reflects the constricted nature of his life: a place to eat, a place to sleep, and a place to defecate. Staring through the wire mesh of his prison cell, his glazed eyes reflect his dreams of running freely through the green fields that are teeming with fluffy bunnies. He is lonely in his cage, and longs for a companion. The limited regard he receives comes from a contemptuous woman and two beguiled children. The woman changes his litter tray and feeds him the stale pellets that have become his tired diet, but she treats him with such bitterness that he knows to stay out of her way. The two children are kinder, but their clasps and strokes smart, while the noises they generate seem to mock him. Their presence only amplifies his loneliness. If only he could escape his captors and live in the green fields with all the other fluffy bunnies. On one occasion, one of the children carries the little black rabbit into a dilapidated shed and lets him roam around freely. The little black rabbit is grateful for his newfound freedom, but the duration of his confinement has caused his muscles to deteriorate. He manages a few hops before lying down in the corner, exhausted and disappointed. His dreams have never seemed so far away, but somewhere deep inside he knows that one day he will reach the green fields and fluffy bunnies. Sometime later, an angry man removes the little black rabbit from his cage by the scruff of his neck, and places him into a small, dark box. The little black rabbit is terrified as his ears are filled with a loud roar and the ground beneath him quakes violently. Eventually these sensations cease, and the angry man sets him down in a forested paddock, leaving him to freely roam around the property. In the beginning, the little black rabbit stays close to the building in which the angry man lives, because occasionally scraps of food are left out for him. But eventually he learns to forage for his own food, munching on the abundant supply of fresh grasses and leaves. Gradually his muscles redevelop and he explores more of the property, meeting other rabbits and finding new types of grasses to chew on. Finally he is free to roam through the green fields with the other fluffy bunnies. One day he discovers a strange creature that slithers along the ground. Recalling the safety of his wooden cage, the little black rabbit reassures himself that nothing can hurt him, so he indulges his curiosity and approaches the creature. Suddenly the creature's jaws snap open, revealing long, pointy teeth. The little black rabbit turns to run but he is too lethargic, his reflexes still dull from an eternity spent in captivity. In a split second, the creature snatches the little black rabbit inside its jaws. As he is slowly digested in the darkness of the creature's stomach, the little black rabbit returns to his dreams of hopping through green fields that are filled with fluffy bunnies.

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Romance in the Sun

Des Burge

The cow stood at the gate and bellowed. Sister Jordan heard it as the Communion host started to dissolve on her tongue. Father Cor Hoakstra heard the distress call too and he finished the Mass and hurried to the sacristy to disrobe. If old Penny was in the house paddock, then the calf may be able to suck her through the fence.

It was a fine September morning. The corrugated iron church was very cold and frost whitened the garden, almost like snow. He'd slept in, so the Mass was late but the cow still knew what time it was as her udders were hurting. As Cor strode swiftly down to the cow yard his shoes crunched on the frozen grass, seeping the cold to his toes. The top of the water tank glittered with frosty jewels as the new sun stretched across the paddock melting the white blanket on the roof of the convent next door. The puddles from yesterday's rain had frozen. Cor smiled to himself. In Holland this would be a day for skating.

That animal was now quiet...too quiet.

Sure enough as he rounded the dairy shed he could see why. That greedy poddy calf had done it again, butting and sucking as if it was starving. Cor opened the gate and old Penny forgot the calf as she rushed for the bails where the chaff and molasses were to be found. Sister Jordan was not far behind and she'd brought a bucket of warm water as well as the milk can.

'Sure that poddy is a devil!' she said. 'He has barged through that tiny hole in the wire. Still, we have lots left from yesterday so there's little harm done.' Cor closed the bail and stood back.

This young nun probably didn't realise how beautiful she was, he thought. She sat on the stool and washed the teats then started milking. Her skin had not yet shown the signs of sun damage so common in migrants.

Perhaps it was the religious habit she wore which shielded her face. The flowing white cotton gown was gathered at her tiny waist by a wide black belt, from which some keys and rosary beads hung. Anne's head was pressed against the cow's side as she worked at extracting the milk. The old Dutch priest wondered how it would feel to have her face pressed against his. All those years up in the islands had never caused the thoughts he'd had since meeting Anne. She'd let her name slip when she chatted of her family back in Ireland. He savoured it. Anne. The name of the mother of Mary. She spoke with the vigour of the young, her comments seeming to see the funny side of any subject. About 1.6 metres tall, she walked with a bounce that Cor found difficult to match. The flashing blue eyes seemed to look into his very soul giving him a kind of communication he hungered for. It was almost like a physical touch. Often when they looked at each other they did not look away. Neither spoke but both knew they were deeply and emotionally together with this wonderful eye contact. Neither wished for it to end.

Penny swished her wet tail across the nun's back so Cor tied it to the rail with a length of twine. His arm touched the nun's left shoulder and he noticed she did

not pull away as he squatted there beside her. Her body was not warm but she turned and smiled, pushing the wimple askew, revealing black hair and a neat ear.

The regular jets of warm milk thrumped into the bucket, the familiar sound taking his thoughts back to his old home.

'My father had twenty to milk back in Friesland but it was all done with the cows under cover over night. Their bodies warmed the dairy.' She was shivering and he realised she was not wearing the old jacket, so went into the feed shed and returned, placing the duffle coat around her body. The freckled hands wanted to stay on those small shoulders forever.

'This old coat is pure wool; thank you Cor.' She called him by his Christian name. They chatted about life back in Holland and Ireland.

As she spoke, he realised she loved their moments too. Was it a sin to enjoy each other so much? He was twenty years older than her, yet they seemed as if they'd known each other for many years. Though he was by no means handsome, his bright blue eyes peering over the horn-rimmed spectacles seemed to capture her as they danced around her face while she chatted. The years in Dutch New Guinea had left him flushing often and weak with malaria but he seemed to blush most whenever they were alone.

Old Penny snuffled into the bin, licking the remains of the molasses she knew were there. A heavy exhale blasted the loose chaff from her nostrils as Cor opened the bail and gave the jersey a gentle rub on the forehead. Anne lifted the pail aside.

'It's lucky they are to have the likes of us country folk to handle the cows. I'm sure some folks think all milk comes from a churn!' Cor smiled. His mother used to say just that. The milk was to be separated in the little dairy shed after it settled, so Cor placed the bucket on the scrubbed pine tabletop. The bright sunlight streamed through the high window highlighting the fog from their breath and particles of chaff dust in the air. He thought of the stained glass in the little church back in Rohl. He used to imagine God was looking through the bright beam as he sent up his childish prayers.

Would He be watching now?

She looked tiny wrapped in the heavy coat and Cor had an urge to hug her close, as he had never hugged anyone before. His right hand reached and slid around her waist, but fumbled as a finger caught in the rope of beads. She didn't step back; just looked frankly into his face and smiled.

He retreated as Anne passed him a cloth to cover the milk, their hands touching as Sister Michael came through the door. Both stepped away from each other and busied themselves with the separator assembly. The senior nun's eyes darted from their hands to their flushed faces.

'Did you stop that little devil getting much of the milk, Sister?

Anne straightened her wimple.

'Ah yes, He had a taste, Sister, but it was only a taste.'

How to Kill a Woman

Lauren Payne

There are many standard methods
That I'm sure you know about,
Like stabbing through her sternum
And then ripping her heart out.
She'll see the whole thing coming,
As you raise that godly blade,
And know that in this moment,
You can watch her life source fade.

Of course, there's always poison,
If you slip it in her tea.
She'll sip it of an evening,
Before suspiciously
Wrinkling her nose
In that way you know you'll miss,
Then coughing, gagging, spluttering,
As life drains from her kiss.

Or else, you could try bludgeoning,
If that's a risk you'll take.
The artistry of violence
Is a beautiful mistake.
The splintered shards of bones and skull,
All painted with your pain,
For she deserves the fear
That is encrusted in her veins.

Another road you could go down
Is pushing her downstairs.
It will seem like an accident,
A crime too sweet to dare!
And as she's lying broken,
Bruised and bleeding on that floor,
You'll smile as she breathes her last;
It makes you love her more.

But if you really want your woman
Utterly destroyed,
There is no finer method
Than this one sadistic ploy,
For you cannot truly kill her
While her heart's within repair:
So leave her without warning.
Now you've proved you just don't care.

I don't want to be anymore

Maureen Hirst

Doing two crosswords,
sudoku, and word-search every day.
Painting, writing my memoirs,
going to the library, reading,
all to keep my brain active.

My brain wants to rest.

Working in the garden,
going for walks,
exercising,
swimming.

Must keep fit they tell me.

But my body needs to rest.

Joining a group and meeting people,
doing a course,
learning a new skill.
Getting involved in local affairs,
volunteering.

My intellect wants a rest.

Throwing a party
for friends and family.
Baby-sitting for my neighbour,
going on holiday.
All to keep myself young.

But I am not young.
My being is tired.

I don't want to be anymore.

Responses to our Haiku challenge!

Maureen Hirst

Gossamer cobwebs
jewelled by the morning mist
clothe the hedgerows

Rose petals falling
Onto polished surfaces
Reflecting silence

Sepia faces
From faded photographs
Forever watching

Time to Challenge Yourself!

Last week, we
tackled haikus.

This week, your
Underground
challenge is:

Chameleon

*Write a poem or
short story either
with "chameleon" as
the major theme,
or featuring the word
"chameleon".*

Remember—think
outside the box!

Innocence

Charmaine Scott

She was beauty and honesty and virtue.
Innocence seeped from her being like the familiar feel
of perspiration from weathered pores.

She was new and pure
in a way that you imagine snow to be but wonder if it ever really is.

Then the terrible thing happened.

She became undone.
Like a jigsaw puzzle; one moment perfect and whole, the next,
pieces of truth crushed into a handful of confusion.

All at once she was lies and fear, hatred and self-loathing.
It seemed instantaneous; maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. Either way, it happened.

A big black cloud descended.

It hovered always, mocking, accusing.
Guilty. Seeing too much, not seeing enough. Fearing too much,
not fearing enough. Believing too much, not believing enough.

The terrible thing became mine, as much as she is mine.
My womb, my creation, my life.

Then the terrible thing went away.

She was done with it; she packed its bags and sent it off
to the place where memories bring not joy
but character and wisdom.

She is courage and strength and belief.
A traveller in a new land, exploring, embracing, rejoicing.

Innocence seeps from her still, like the scent of roses dancing on a summer breeze.

As sunlight streams through the cloud, I can finally turn my back
on the obesity of guilt and fear that has pulsed
inside me like a malignant, consuming tumour.

She has taken me to places I could never have dreamed of.
Shown me I am the only limit to my existence. She will never disappoint me.

She is beauty and honesty and virtue.

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To submit your work to Underground,
email your submission as an attachment to: submissions@underground-writers.org