

The Wild Goose.

Issue 3 Volume 1 December 2015.



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December is a themed issue. The theme will be announced in June of each year.

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From the Editor

Natalie Muller

Well it's December again and that means that it is *The Wild Goose Literary e-Journal's* first birthday. We're one year old.

This being our summer, this is our themed issue and this year the theme was *Desire*. Thinking about this theme makes me think about two different plays that I encountered for the first time this year in both of which desire proves to be the undoing of the protagonists.

The first was the lesser known Richard of Shakespeare's history plays, the one who spark off the whole rivalry between the houses of York and Lancaster: *Richard II*. King Richard manages to bring ruin down on himself when he takes the inheritance of his banished cousin Bolingbroke. His eagerness to listen to flatterers and his desire for a quick solution to straightened economic circumstances, leave him blind to reason and the possibility that even kings have limits.

The second play was one of Shakespeare's later plays, *Antony and Cleopatra*, a play whose title alone speaks of passion and desire. These legendary lovers, Romeo and Juliet for grown up people if you will, are undone by desire. And yet, a life without desire especially satisfied desires, would be a barren one indeed, as Shakespeare shows us in the character of Octavian. Sure this dull bureaucratic, plodder will go on to become sole ruler of the Roman world, but in this play it is the losers who ultimately win. Octavian may have been declared a god in his day, but Antony and Cleopatra became immortal.

Freedom from desire may be a goal in Buddhism, but I think we can be grateful our writers haven't found Enlightenment just yet. The writers within this issue have taken this quarter's theme to mean many different things, desire for money, desire that conflicts with family or tradition, desire for taboos, and the desire to do all we can for another.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of *The Wild Goose Literary e-Journal*, and I will talk to you again next quarter.

Happy reading!

Emma

Johanne Taylor

The convict men have brought him up from the cattle yards and lain him upon the bed. It was a steer, they says, that got about and pinned James to the fence. It held him there for long enough to break him. All his chest is black and blue and he is not sensible. I have sent for the doctor and for the priest. There is nothing more to do.

Dr Edward has come and he has seen James. He says the potion he gave was for the pain. He says it will make him sleep. He says that there is nothing more for it. Sleep for your husband, he says. Rest for your husband, he says. I will return in the morning he says. He left the remainder of the potion.

It is in God's hands now.

Mr Toombs has been very kind. He came as soon as he could and he brought Kate with him to keep company with me. He has said the last rights. He says he does not know if it is needed, but it is better to have said than to have not. A practical man is Mr Toombs.

Dr Edward has returned this morning. He is pleased that James is breathing still. I am pleased that James is breathing still. If he were not I would be a widow and in mourning. It is not a good thing to be a young widow. An old widow commands respect while the young must go forth and seek her fortune still.

He says that I am not to give too much potion. The potion in small doses helps with the pain, but in large doses, he says, may stop it all together. He is a good man, is Dr Edward. He says that he has sent word to James's brother and hopes that he will come. I cannot fault the man. He has done what is right.

When Dr Edward took his leave, Kate took my hand and she says *what will you do if he comes*. I says *I do not know*.

I know that James McReady had no time to take with his brother. He says they had emigrated together. He came to get a farm and to live a good, Christian life. He says

Lachlan had other ideas and almost brought them both to ruin. He went his own way and left Lachlan down in Sydney Town to work at schemes to help settle new emigrants at a handsome price, of course. The money Lachlan took and drank and gambled whenever he could.

James showed me some letters in which his brother pleaded for money to pay his debts. He also showed me some letters from Lachlan's debtors seeking other moneys where Lachlan had given his brother's name without any agreement.

How does he manage it I says. James did tell of a pleasing manner and the charm that gained him favour with the unsuspecting souls. He loses favour quickly says James *when they find that he is not a man of means or a man of his word.*

I know that James would not be pleased to have his brother in his house and, if he were sensible, he would refuse Lachlan entry all together. I can only pray that word does not reach the dissolute brother and that he does not join us.

My prayers are not answered. Lachlan is come.

I came as quick as I could he says.

Seated before me is a handsome man. He has a strong jaw, a fine figure and a pleasing manner. He has won the ear of Dr Edward, who knows nothing of what has transpired before. Mr Toombs is not taken in. Kate has told her husband the details of the brothers that I had confided in her. Mr Toombs is not one to be taken in by outward pleasantries on any account. A practical man is Mr Toombs.

Lachlan has told me that he intends to take over his brother's affairs during his convalescence. I says I thank you kindly but Mr Watt the lawyer is seeing to our affairs.

He says *how did this come about.*

I says *it was arranged by James before my time that if he was to come to grief then Mr Watt should manage his affairs until he is well again.*

He says *that this is wrong and that he will have it changed. Who better than to manage poor James's affairs than his loving brother says he it could be months before he is recovered. Imagine the lawyer's fees even for just the past fortnight.*

Lachlan has returned from Mr Watt's having been sent away with a flea in his ear. He says the arrangements made by James are all right and proper in the law. Mr Watt says that for James's wishes to be changed without his agreement it would need a challenge in the courts. Lachlan says he will challenge in the courts if he needs to.

Lachlan tries to wheedle with me. *Louisa he says what will you do if James does not come right.* He has an open and honest face all set to kindness. I have seen his face go from all sunny to all black in an instance. His face is not one that I will trust.

I am not Louisa I says *I am Emma and I will care for James as a wife should until he no longer needs my care.*

Emma he says. He is frowning. He says *I thought he married that girl of Thomas Reilly's from Parramatta. Louisa was her name. All that courting and wooing came to nought then.*

He did marry Louisa I says *and she passed last winter.*

She passed last winter. He is still trying to work through the puzzle. *She had a good income too* he says. *Where are you from.*

I emigrated from Dorset I says.

One of the poor farm girls come over as servants he says.

You've made your way in the world. Come here as a servant did you. Slip into the master's bed when the wife was gone did you he says. I see he thinks he has won a triumph. He knows what has happened here.

I did not I says. I stand as I will not have such a man be above me. *I came to the store in Bathurst and made an honest living working in the shop helping the ladies. I beg you to take you leave* I says.

You have not business here. I make for the door.

No business he says. He gets out of his seat and glares at me. *No business* he says *my only brother is lying senseless in that room.* He pointed towards my little parlour. He has not seen his brother and does not know where he lies. He is a fool this man.

You have not asked after him I says *so you cannot care so much.*

I go to the door and hold it ajar. *I beg you to leave. I cannot serve you and care for my husband also* I says.

Granger, the overseer sent by Mr Watt, is at the kitchen watching.

Mr McReady he says nice and loud so all around can hear it *I have made your horse ready. The inn at Queen Charlotte Vale will serve a fine mutton tonight I think* he says.

Granger saw Mr Lachlan on his way and I am grateful to him and to Mr Watt.

James is still as he was and he does not know of the turmoil caused by his brother this past week. He is very black and blue and not sensible. Dr Edward says that the potion is keeping him insensible and he will need to be given less or he will remain insensible.

I wait for Kate to come again. She has proved herself a good friend. Mr Toombs says that his comforts are simple and he does not need his wife when others have such need for her. He is a good man is Mr Toombs.

Lachlan is returned instead. He looks as if he is the cat with the cream. What his plans are I do not know. He cannot send me away says Mr Watt. I stand firm.

You admit you were not chaste when you married says he.

I know not how he came this information.

I says that *I was not and I had told James the same.*

And my brother had no objection. His face is all ugly with a sneer. He thinks he can paint me scarlet and have me scurry from my home.

Your brother is a good and decent man of the world.

My brother is a fool he says. I shall see you gone from this house he says.

I had been meant to marry at seventeen. Young William Carter was a fine man from the estate. I have to say young because if I said only William people around those parts would think I meant his father and his father was not a fine man. He was a mean man and a drunk, who had beat William's mother senseless one night and put her out of the house. She was took in by her sister, but was never right after that.

William and me were promised to each other and we had lain together as happens when you are promised and there is no-one to put you asunder. We had no money to set up house, so William went to the city for work. He was going to make money and then he would come back in a year or two and we would marry.

He was dead in six weeks. He caught the shitting sickness and died on the floor of a hovel with water coming from his bowels. He hadn't made a penny for our marriage.

So there I was no longer pure and, without the church wedding, respectable. There was no work for me and I wasn't going to the city for it. I would not die on the floor shitting my life away amongst strangers.

I emigrated to New South Wales. I was as far from the village with no husband and the city with only death as I could be. I came to Sydney and the Female Immigrants Home and I crossed the mountains in a cart with so many other lost souls, our way being led by Mrs Chisholm on her white horse. Then I came to Bathurst and was taken to work at the dry goods store. Mary Eden was taken to the same establishment as the lady's maid. How she crowed! She a lady's maid and me a shop girl. She's still there best as I know.

I said all this to James and he had no objection. He seen me as a widow not fallen or ruined. He is not like some other men in that, but he is a decent man of the world. He said he was glad that I knew my duty as a wife and did not shy from it.

I will not say any of this to Lachlan. It is not for him to know.

Mr Watt has been with news of Lachlan. These past three weeks he has been seen in the company of Mary Eden. This gives me explanation of the information he has been using to ruin my good name. Mr Watt says that Lachlan is going about scandalising the inn patrons with tales of my wicked behaviour. While I am home caring for my invalid husband, he is painting me scarlet to every person who will listen.

Mr Watt says Lachlan cannot send me away. He says I am the right and lawful wife of a good man who needs my care. He has instructed Granger to keep close when Lachlan is about and to make sure that I keep safe.

I says that Granger has been a great help in that regard.

He says *never mind the gossips. They will go their way and find other scandals in time.*

I says *I am still to show my face in church.*

He says *I should hold my head high. It is all that will quiet the gossips.*

You have the care of the priest from Queen Charlotte Vale he says Toombs and his wife.

Yes. Kate emigrated on the same ship as me. Mr Toombs and her are providing all the care that any person could want.

He says I should take strength in that.

He says *do I need anything.*

I says that we need provisions. I says *I have a list.*

Mr Watt takes the list from me. He says he will arrange for it.

Your marriage was two or three months following the death of your friend. Some would call that indecent.

Lachlan has returned with more of his scandals. He has still not seen his brother. He says it is of no account to see him when he is as brainless as a sheep.

I says *Louisa passed in June and we did not marry until December. James began to call in October. It was not so indecent.*

He says *was there any reason for an early marriage.* He has tried to catch me against the table. It's as if he wishes to make an examination of my person and find some evidence of treachery.

I says *no* and I take myself away from him.

He says *the marriage was unnaturally soon. Why would a man of means hurry into a new marriage?* He tries again to unsettle my nerves, but I can see him and his purposes.

He has turned his attentions to the dresser, seeking I know not what.

I says *he wished for a son. The only hope to get one is to marry. He wishes for an heir to leave his land to.*

He turns, his face almost purple with sudden rage.

He says *he has me for an heir. I have sons to carry the family name.* He is near shouting.

I says *where is your wife then. Where is your children. You have come here for four weeks and three days. How is she keeping. What will Mary Eden make of your attentions once she knows of your wife.*

I am safe on the other side of the table. I have met his kind before. He is all bluff and bluster to get the better of me.

He says *his wife is keeping well.* I know by the tone he says it that she is not. I see his collar is frayed and his boots need mending. I see what he is and he does know it.

I says *the innkeeper at Queen Charlotte Vale has sent word of your debt to him.* I have the better of him, but he will not concede.

He says *you should pay it then.*

I says that *it is not mine to pay. You can clear your own debts. You can take your leave now.* I go to the door to send him on his way.

He says *I want what is right and mine. That shirker is keeping it from me.* He points to the door to my little parlour. He still does not know that his brother lies elsewhere.

I says *what do you mean.*

He has is ugly face on and his sneer. He says *when my brother dies I shall have it all.*

He goes into the parlour and stops for a moment. He is all in confusion as he has the wrong room. There is just one other, so it takes him no time to change course. He runs through the main room and into the bedchamber. I follow fast. I try as I will to catch him, but he is quicker and stronger than me. He goes to the bedside and takes the potion that Dr Edward has left and holds it over his brother. James's eyes are closed and his mouth is closed and he is sleeping. Lachlan hesitates. He does not know how to give the potion that he surely thinks will take his brother to heaven.

He takes James's chin to force open his mouth to pour the potion in. James is not asleep and I knew this. He has been improving every day. His eyes fly open and he sits with a roar. The shock causes Lachlan to stumble back and fall onto the seat of his pants. The potion flies in the air and the bottle shatters on the floor.

Lachlan sits on the floor in a terrible state. He gazes at his invalid brother. He is a fool that did not know that his brother gained strength each day of these past two weeks.

James says the terrible truth.

Lachlan he says you won't get a single penny when I pass. You are not to darken my door again. You should go and see to your wife and your children. You have made nothing but mischief since you came and you will leave.

Granger is at the door. He will make sure that Lachlan leaves the house. He says he will see Lachlan all the way to Bathurst and he will see him further if need be.

Lachlan says he needs money for the journey. James says to Granger that he could take Lachlan to Mr Watt. He says *Mr Watt will do as is right.*

I says *it was a good trick.*

James says it was the only trick he had. The excitement tired him so and he needed extra rest for days after. Dr Edward says that he almost undid his healing.

I says *I am happy my husband is healing nicely.*

I says *he would not have had a penny in any case.* I petted my belly. James smiled a good smile. He says *we did not need to risk fate by telling him of it.*

Mr Watt has come with news. He says he made enquiries after Lachlan's wife and children. He says that they were abandoned more than a year before. Lachlan's wife had taken in laundry before falling ill with the same malady that took her sons. He says they all had a terrible time of it and the surviving children, two little girls, were in the orphanage. He says did we want them.

Lachlan was travelling back to Sydney over the mountains. He had lost all the money he was given in a bet gone wrong. He says it was only enough to pay his way. He was found dead and cold by the road two months past with a great bloody wound on his head. There was blood on a branch just the right height for him to have hit it if he was travelling at some speed. It is a sad end for the man.

Mr Watt says he was buried in a sandy spot near where he died. There was no churchyard near and no one to carry him far. His horse was sold to pay some debts. There are more debts to be paid.

James says that he will pay them because there won't be any more. He says he is not sorry to lose his brother. He is sorry to hear of the wife and children.

I says *I would like to have the little girls. They can help with the baby. They can get some schooling with Kate now she has started a schoolroom.* I says *it is our duty to care for our kin.*

Mr Toombs has come. He says here are your little helpers. He has a trap full of little girls.

I says *I thought there was just two.*

He is smiling so bright. He come down from his seat and passes to us Queenie who is six and has red hair and Maggie who is four and has hair like yellow straw. Mr Toombs had business in Sydney Town and was good enough to escort the children home to us.

There are two other little girls in the trap. He says that these are Mary and Jane. He took them for Kate.

I says *Kate will like that.*

He says *have you heard of Mary Egan.*

I says *I have not.*

He says she is fallen. He says Lachlan promised himself to her and took advantage. He has found her another position nursing an elderly widower in Bathurst as she was let go when her belly filled. She will most likely need a new start when the time comes.

I says *yes.*

A practical man is Mr Toombs.

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Unnatural desire

Jessie Taylor

My uncle's death was announced unceremoniously, during the quiet of a lazy afternoon. One minute he was alive, observing everything with clear, lucid eyes and the next he was gone, as if the world had swallowed him whole.

Light, which had previously flooded the room, disappeared almost immediately.

My mother, who was in the hospital room at the time, clung desperately onto her brother's limp hand, and, when he didn't respond she reached for my own, grasping it so tightly I thought I'd feel the crushing weight of it forever. My father, who was not in the room at the time, did not rush in to console my mother, but instead, stood in the hallway. His arms were crossed. His jaw was clenched.

That night, my father claimed it was 'unnatural desire' that killed my uncle. "A lifetime of sinful acts", he said, "necessarily begets punishment". He lectured us both -my mother and I- at the dinner table, as we ate overcooked steak and chalky greens.

The food was exceedingly salty. I tried not to think about my mother's tears, which had not stopped since we had left the hospital. At first she had tried to dab them away. With shaky hands and a white, pristine handkerchief she'd tried to wipe away all the sadness that was helplessly leaking out. My father, in all his wisdom, had pretended not to notice her suffering, ignoring the ever constant trails of wetness that it had left on her cheeks. Instead he lectured us both, at the dinner table, on the night of my uncle's death.

It was three days later when I finally saw my mother without the telltale signs of a night filled with tears. Her characteristic smile full of slightly crooked teeth hadn't yet returned, but it was encouraging to see her without red, puffy eyes, raw from grief.

That morning she floated into the kitchen as I was eating breakfast and set about boiling the kettle. Her dressing gown was wrapped tightly around her, creating a lavender cocoon. When she saw the sink full of unwashed dishes, she sighed and immediately started rinsing them. I watched as she turned the dirty plates and coffee mugs white again, washing away all that tainted them.

I didn't mean to ask her -I felt guilty even thinking about it- but the words were persistent, filling up all the empty spaces in my head and eventually tumbling from my mouth.

“Uncle Jeremiah was gay, wasn't he?”

My mother was silent for a moment. The line of her shoulders was defeated and heavy when she said, “Yes”.

Suddenly, my heart was free falling in my chest.

I waited a few seconds to gather the next question, tasting the risk and impossibility of it.

“Is that why he died?” I finally asked, “As punishment for loving another man?”

My mother's responding sigh was sharp and it said, *No more questions, Bethany.*

Loss consumed my mother, guilt consumed me and righteousness consumed my father. It was left unspoken, but I knew that he held an unfathomable amount of contempt for my uncle and for people who were like him.

On Friday night we found ourselves at the Evans' house, taking part in one of their bi-annual dinner parties. As always, it promised to be a night of wine tasting and dainty appetisers and tedious suburban conversation. I had hoped we'd cancel -given the circumstances- but my mother thought it would reflect badly on us. Of course my father agreed, he didn't want anyone asking questions.

I was standing in the Evans' pristine living room -perfectly arranged flower bouquets, expensive leather lounges, intricately crocheted doilies- with a glass of homemade lemonade in my hand when it all became too much.

Across the room, I watched my parents chatting enthusiastically with some of the other middle-aged guests. One of them offered a joke, perhaps about the latest politician or a recent sports scandal and everyone erupted with laughter.

My father's laugh was deep and hearty and also endlessly shallow. My mother smiled beautifully, as she had always done, whilst standing next to my father. From the outside, you could not tell that we were blemished in any sort of way. Nor could you tell that we had experienced a recent death in the family.

Suddenly, I couldn't breathe. The lemonade's bitterness was at the back of my throat and it felt all-consuming. The laughter rang in my ears and all at once the party was this cacophony in my head. I felt too big for this small space around me. Something was weighing down on my chest, making it numb, and no matter how much I breathed in, I felt like my lungs weren't getting any air.

Abandoning my drink on a nearby coster I hurried outside and collapsed into the shadows at the back of the house. I didn't know what to do. I tried to focus on the sky above, blue and black like a bruise. I tried to focus on the swing set in the upper corner of the backyard, rusted away with neglect. I tried to focus on everything and anything else. I tried to pretend that the ever-consuming guilt inside of me didn't exist.

And then I heard a sound: the crunching of footsteps falling onto the dusk-dewy grass.

I prepared myself for my father, insisting in forceful, controlled tones that I join them inside. I prepared myself for my mother, with her quiet tears and broken heart. What I did not expect to see was our hosts' daughter, Emilia Evans, with her elegant, heart-shaped face and bright, brown eyes, emerging from around the corner of the house.

We had met briefly on a number of occasions, trading shy, nervous smiles. Her family were regulars at the church and every Sunday, I would watch her during

morning service. She always sat three rows in front of ours, positioned under one of the church's modest, frosted-glass windows and at around 7:14am sunlight would stream in and flood her features. I'd watch her and think: Ah, so angels do exist.

That was before Uncle Jeremiah though; before my mother had gotten the call from him all those months ago when he'd told her that he was dying. It was before I even knew I had an uncle and before I could put an actual word to this guilty desire that was nestled inside of myself.

Emilia came towards me, rushing to my side. Her expression was soft and kind when she saw my tears. I hadn't even noticed that they were there.

She told me she'd heard about my uncle. How she'd heard, I had no idea. Maybe my mother had told hers. Maybe she really was an angel - all seeing, all knowing.

She told me she was sorry.

I was leaning against the cool brick wall and she was leaning into me. I could feel the lace of her dress against my leg. She was so unbearably close. I needed her to be closer.

Her eyes were on my mouth, on the tears rolling down my cheeks.

I thought: This is going to happen. This is going to happen.

Time stuttered.

Overhead, the dark house towered judgementally.

I licked my lips and tasted desire.

And then we were kissing. Helplessly, hopelessly, desperately. It was perfect and innocent and natural and so, so sweet. I thought I was going to cry out, simply from the sweetness of it.

On Sunday morning I sat in the pews, wringing my hands together, biting my lips. Guilt twisted deep inside of me. But also, an elation and an exuberance that could not be separated from the desire I had held within for so long.

I felt so, so joyful and yet so, so wretched.

My mother was sat beside me, her makeup smudged around her eyes. My father was sat beside her, more present than he had ever been at my uncle's deathbed.

Father Jacobs, from his podium, beckoned us into a prayer.

And so, I prayed for a world where my Uncle Jeremiah was still alive; a world where I had been able to get to know him, properly, and not just in death.

And so, I prayed for a world where he could have been accepted; a world where my father would have offered him a place at our table and a place in his heart.

And so, I prayed for a world that would accept me as well and accept the kiss I had shared with Emilia Evans.

When I sat back down light flooded the room and when I looked up, Emilia was smiling back at me.

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Dark Stars

Su Lwin

My sister was born under a dark star.

I've heard people talk about 'sibling rivalry' before, but if such a thing ever existed between us, I don't remember it.

My earliest memory was of her, tucked under covers with flashlights reading fairy-tales to me while our parents slept. She would sit with one knee on either side of me, with the book held out in front, holding me closely. I never felt safer than when I was in her arms. "I hope we'll always be together," she said one night. I wondered what made her think we would ever be apart.

Sometimes our mother would discover us the next day, a tangle of limbs and blankets. I heard them fighting soon after that. One the words she used was "filthy".

We stopped reading under covers.

They would pick her up from our house, in cars that I heard before I saw them. I would answer the door, wanting to see what her taste was. They were all different versions of the same guy, but I never saw the same one twice.

She would come home with messy hair and clothes unkempt after those nightly excursions. We never talked about where she went, or what she did, but she would always come into my room afterwards and crawl into my bed.

"I hope you never treat a girl the way I've been treated," she would say, in a voice that didn't sound like her.

Then there were the parties. Every weekend, it became a ritual for her to call me into her room and help her choose what to wear. She would carefully apply makeup to her face for hours, trying to perfect what she didn't already know was perfect.

I would wait up nights for her to open the door when she came home. After I opened the door, she would stumble to the bathroom and begin throwing up the

contents of dinner. I would carry her to bed, where she would pass out with all her makeup and clothes still on, and sleep until the afternoon.

“I think your sister has a drinking problem,” our mother said the next morning.

That night, I heard shouting, the sound of glass breaking and a door slamming. I didn't see my sister for a long time after that.

A few weeks later, I came home to discover her in her room, packing a suitcase.

“There you are,” she said, as if she had been looking for me all this time.

“You were the only thing I missed about this place,” she said, walking over to give me a hug.

“Where are you going?” I asked her, my voice breaking a little as I said it.

“I'm moving overseas,” she replied, not meeting my gaze. “I haven't decided where yet.”

“Is it because of Mom? You don't have to leave the country. If you're going to move out, I could go with you.”

“I just want to get away from here. I've never had much luck,” she said, wiping away something in the corner of her eye. “Maybe I was born under a dark star.”

“I don't want you to go. I'll never see you.”

“I know. But we both know that it's better if we're apart.”

That moment was the first time I discovered what it meant to get your heart broken. She walked over and kissed me for the last time, before walking out the door.

Several years passed. I got older and taller, and before I knew it, I had a girlfriend. I still carried around the wallet that my sister had given me, and one day my girlfriend saw the picture in it.

“Who’s that girl? She’s pretty,” she said, grabbing the wallet off me to look at the picture intently.

“That’s my sister,” I said, taking the wallet back and putting it in my pocket.

“Oh,” she sighed. “I thought it might have been an ex-girlfriend. You two look so close.”

Her comment brought back painful old memories that I had struggled to keep away. Not long after that, we broke up. No matter what I did, or how hard I tried, nothing could make me forget the dull ache I felt whenever I thought about her. I kept myself busy, going through the motions of everyday life, but I could never shake the feeling that my life had lost all meaning since she left.

A year later, I got a telephone call from my mother. It had been some time since I had heard from her, and I was surprised that she was calling.

“What’s the matter?”

“Your sister’s getting married.”

“To who?” I asked. I began gripping the cup I was holding so tight that my palm burned.

“She didn’t say. I suppose it’s a whirlwind romance, you know what she’s like. She just called to invite us to the wedding. It’s in a month.”

“Where?”

“In Tokyo.” I held the phone away from my ear, wishing I wasn’t hearing this.

“Are you still there? I’m really glad that she’s getting married. Things weren’t going well for her for a long time. And you two were just too close for your own good,” she mused, as if she were talking to herself.

I didn't remember hanging up the phone or what I said after that.

The next week, I was on a plane to Tokyo.

I showed up at the address she had given me, clutching my bag tightly. It had been such a long time, I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if things would be different between us, or if we would pick up where we left off. I got off the subway and walked down streets for what felt like an eternity, until I arrived at her place.

There were plants and trees all around the building, and white pebbles on the ground around the footpath, which looked as if they had never touched dirt before. Everything was pristine, and perfect, and I felt as if I was dirty, disturbing the clean, quiet perfection of my sister's residence.

A few moments after I pressed the doorbell, an elderly woman came to the door. She looked confused to see me, and started asking me something in Japanese. I heard another female voice, followed by footsteps, faint but sure.

"There you are," she murmured when she saw me, as if she had been waiting for me all this time.

"Well, give me a hug," she said, opening her arms.

As she let go of me, I finally noticed my surroundings. Natural sunlight was streaming in through the skylights. The room was filled with white, minimal furniture. Everything about this place screamed money, and lots of it.

"What did you do?" I asked her.

She knew what I meant, because she blushed and turned away from me. "I met someone here. He's a bit older than me. I just decided to marry him because it seemed like the kind of thing people in love do."

Her voice sounded strange as she said the word 'love' like she was going to choke on it.

“You don’t know what love is. You’ve never been in it.”

“Don’t talk to me about love,” she said, in a tone so cold it could have turned the room to ice. “I’m going to get ready for dinner. You can come, or you can stay here alone.”

A man in a suit drove us to a restaurant in a black sedan that had a fresh, just-bought smell. The restaurant was quiet, and we were taken to a private room in the back. There was a man and a woman waiting for us in the room with a bottle of sake. They looked old enough to be our parents.

She greeted them and introduced me in Japanese. The woman smiled at me, making me uncomfortable. It was the kind of smile that someone uses when they want something. My sister and the man looked awkward together, they didn’t match. There was something improper about the way he stroked her shoulders, and I didn’t like it.

After drinking, the four of us returned to the house together. After that my sister and the man disappeared, and I went to another bedroom in the house. The woman from dinner followed me into my bedroom and began to remove her clothes.

“I’m not interested,” I told her.

“She’s not yours anymore,” she replied, getting into bed. “You have to forget about her.”

Drunk, and too tired to protest, I let the woman do what she wanted, before I drifted off into a heavy sleep.

I was woken the next morning by the sunlight drifting in through the skylight. The woman was gone. I went downstairs and found my sister by herself, a cloud of white material covering the floor.

“Zip me up, will you?” Her skin was smooth and white, like alabaster, the skin I hadn’t touched in years.

“You slept with that woman last night, didn’t you?”

I didn’t reply, and my sister took my silence as a yes.

“She’s disgusting. Preying on little boys.”

I could have said the same thing about her fiancée, but chose to remain silent.

“You don’t have to get married to that man,” I told her, spinning her around to face me. “We could leave together and go somewhere we don’t know anyone”.

“You know we can’t,” she said, looking at me properly for the first time since I got here. “What happened between us that time- it won’t happen again. What we have between us is unnatural, and it’s dangerous. You’ll understand what I mean someday.”

She turned back around and looked at my reflection in the mirror as she spoke. “Zip up my dress and then we need to leave.”

We got into a black car outside which whisked us away to the future. We didn’t talk at all the whole way. When we got out, she turned to me and pleaded “just do this one last thing for me.”

Without waiting for a response, she linked her arm through mine and I automatically did what she had wanted me to all along. I walked her down the aisle, both of us with smiles plastered to our faces, making believe that we were happy.

<http://sulwin.wordpress.com/>

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The Postmistress

Joanne Varney

She held the small object between the index finger and thumb of her thin bony hand, her carefully manicured nails, varnished crimson stood out against a backdrop of golden yellows and emerald greens. Her heart began to race, her mind dizzy, and her whole body shaking. anticipation held her in its grasp. She couldn't wait till tonight when she would go on yet another journey.....

Forty years ago she had started this job, young, kind, ever eager to please, she took up the position of postmistress in the small town of Thomastown, central Tasmania, its main feature was a mural on every side wall of every shop, the tourists loved to visit and this brought in much needed economy for the town. The building that housed the daily transactions of the locals, her building, hadn't as yet, succumbed to the committee's request of having a mural on the west side. She was glad for she loved that federation style, its features would only be destroyed if the committee had its way, luckily for her, and head office had sided with her on that very precedent.

So there it stood in all its glory of baked brown bricks, timber casement windows and a wooden door with its sign always turned to open, ready to meet any request.

At that particular time it was all that she needed but as the years rolled along she felt trapped, uncomfortable and definitely afraid to venture far beyond, she had heard so many stories of the outside world and this frightened her. She wanted so much to feel and be a part of what they often talked about when they came into her shop, but she could never leave the safety of her world and so to compensate she started taking home the contraband. At first it was just those that had been left behind, very soon however she added those who were late in being picked up and then it grew to those whose recipients receive plenty and that's how it stayed. It had been only a few times in her memory that a recipient had enquired then just like magic, it suddenly turned up a few days later. Her secret was safe and so the charade continued on for years.

The sound of the doorbell interrupted her ponderings, quickly snapping herself back into reality, she hid the object under the nearest box, ran her arms down her serge grey suit and straightened her glasses. She didn't want to be caught out, that would simply not do for she had a reputation to uphold, No one must ever know. Many a time the folks had come in only to find her curled up on a chair, fast asleep, but that had all stopped when Mr Bertrand Walsh, the representative from Hobart Head Office, gave a surprise visit one day and found her asleep.

“Taking a little liberty aren't we Miss Angela.” “You are aware of course, that if you're unable to do this job we can easily find another replacement...”

“Oh yes sir “she said standing up almost to attention.

“I am aware, very sorry sir. “It won't happen again”.

“It had better not, I'll let it pass for now,” he said.

The hour long inspection was tiresome, she was so nervous but she was determined not to show it and as he was about to depart she said smiling between her teeth, “See you again next year, Mr Walsh. Have a good trip, please pass on my regards to Mr Hamilton.”

Closing the wooden door behind him, she gave out a loud frustrated harrumph. Oh how she despised that man, he was always looking for any excuse to get her out so his niece could take over. She stood steadfast, they will have to bury me first she said to herself.

Waiting till all the customers were gone, she snapped up her prize from its hiding place under the counter and moved on back to where lost things go to accumulate. Carefully negotiating the assorted objects she lowered herself into the old chair. She looked around, one day I'll do something about all this, but for now she was anxiously waiting for a closer glimpse of today's excitement.

The old fashioned question of morals and right doing popped quickly into her head, passing its judgement for she was brought up a strict Methodist and no matter what the reason you never stole.

Papa would be so ashamed of me, to steal was a sin but it was only a little thing! Surely he could see that she didn't mean any harm. She felt tormented but at the same time consoled for it filled a much needed gap in her plain, ordinary life. If this is the only thing I do wrong, then it's nothing in worldly standards and besides nobody would notice if a few postal items went missing. Would they? Her mind raced on towards what she was going to do when she got home. The sheer excitement feeding her imagination. But what if someone found out, she might lose her job? That was the risk she was prepared to take. Turning the A6 size object over in her hand she looked up making sure there was no one coming through the door.

Today's thrill was from a place called Florida, with palm trees and a golden sunset on the front. She pictured herself on the beach drinking a glass of cool fruit punch with a touch of vodka and one of those colourful little umbrellas. She laughed, almost out loud saying to herself, and I don't even drink! She took one last look and carefully filed the prize away in her handbag,

"Tonight is going to be the last time," she told herself. "This has got to stop."

The day seemed to past so slowly, people from the local township always took their time with everything, they walked slowly, talked slowly, shopped slowly almost as if time had stopped still, or vacated the earth so that their lives could run on a permanent slow, in some ways it was good for there was little stress and everyone just went about their daily business at their own pace and not really worrying about anything. If you lived here you were soon accustomed to the way of things and if not, then you moved on.

The big smoke was only a few hours away by road, then it's a boat ride across a flat sea for most part of the year. Many a young person had taken off in search of their dreams, looking for the illusion of a better life, some had returned after only a few short months but many however stayed on and tried to make a go of things.

Even the clock on the wall ticked slowly, its age starting to show, face faded, hands bent, it could still keep perfect time even though it was now over forty years old.

The hands on the clock moved onto five minutes to four, rush hour, she said to herself even though folks were genuinely slow with things it also created the problem

of them being behind in their activities, so of course at the end of any day, people often rushed in at the last minute to purchase stamps or post some parcel of some sort. This evidently led to her finishing late and not getting home until darkness had fallen and the streets were bare.

Before she noticed, Angela found herself shutting the door, locking the latch and turning the sign to close. Slowly she walked into the back area of the shop, this job was starting to impact on her health, she felt weary and her bones ached but to give up her job would mean a great loss, the death of all she'd known, the biggest loss being, saying farewell to her ever expanding amounts of the contraband. That was the reason she'd stayed so long and never moved onto bigger and better things. Could she exist on stocks? Yes, quite easily, but I would miss the thrill of the secret.

She exhaled loudly. "I just don't want to think about it, but someday, that day will come and I will have to decide."

Donning her blue felt hat and her red woollen cape she gathered her handbag with its precious cargo and stepped out onto the back landing, keyed the new security code into the lock and pulled the back door shut.

The walk to her flat wasn't far, only about 500metres down the winding road that lead to the outskirts of town. Scanning the horizon she saw the last remnants of a beautiful day. She could see in the distance that a storm was brewing ominous dark grey/black clouds heralded a warning, quickly get inside, don't dally. Quickening her step she needed to get home before the storm released its contents, focusing on the sky and not the pavement she didn't notice the crack, her ankle twisted in the hole producing a loud grinding sound, almost in an instant she knew she was in trouble. Her knees buckled under the pressure and sided with her ankle, suddenly the ground met with her face. For a while she just laid awkwardly in that spot and tried to gain her wits about her, a sharp pain was now shooting straight down her spine and her ankle looked malformed and was starting to bruise. It was dusk now and pretty soon there wouldn't be anyone travelling along this road at night. Gathering what was the last of her inner strength, she pulled herself along to the roads edge and lay there hoping against all hope someone would come along and help.

Day light faded to night, the rain fell, her cold fingers reached into her handbag and withdrew the contraband.

Morning arrived with the sun beating down on the muddy road that lead to the outskirts of town. Rain had been heavy all night soaking absolutely everything. Creeks filled and rivers rushed forward, the hour had not quite reached seven when a lonely white pickup truck came into view, swerving around potholes and taking its time to negotiate the sodden path.

Mr Brown noticed the unusual mound off to the side of the road. What's happened here he thought to himself, slowing down to gain a better view. It's a figure, laying across the road, instantly he pulled his old ford pickup to a shrieking halt. With the engine still humming, he gathered his wits and jumped out of his truck, running across the road, he stood leaning over the mound. Crouching down onto his haunches he extended his arm over, slowly lifted the woollen cape, a gasp forged forward from his mouth, realising straight away who it was, he carefully placed the cape back over her face. With his head lowered, a crystal tear sat in the corner of his eye.

Instantly his mind took him back to when he was nine, small for his age, he'd been dared by his older brother to steal from her, he remembers waiting till she was out of sight, darting to the shelf and snatching the very first thing at hand, a pocket notebook, he tried to run but she stepped out from behind the shelf, cutting him off saying "And what can I do for you today master brown?"

Her hawk like eyes glared straight at him, eye to eye, he tried to say it was for a friend but she knew all too well and said

"I'll let you have it for now but next time tell that brother of yours to do his own dirty work".

Lowering his head, he nodded. Not sure of what to do next he waited.

Then she just smiled and stepped aside, quickly he made his way to the door, she watched him leave knowing all too well he'll be back.

A tear made its way down his cheek as the sadness overcame him, courageously he got up and walked slowly over to his truck to make the call. Picking up his mobile, hand shaking, voice croaky, relayed the urgent message to the Police.

Twenty minutes later Constable Jones and his wife Judy arrived, Tears in their eyes brimmed and heads nodded at the loss. Mrs Jones turned to husband saying “this is so sad, her life was full of dreams, fantasies, and simple pleasures, “I only wish she knew that the whole town figured it out a long time ago. We allowed it to happen, as a kind of payback for the many years she had been here and had helped all of us in some way or another, she made us what we are today.”

Judy Jones arranged a funeral to which the whole town turned out, it was decided that in her casket her collection would be placed beside her, stacked neatly in piles from A-to Z. The last one was placed on top of her heart.

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If I Can Do This For You.

Bec Lawrence

I am utterly terrified. Terrified of who I will become. Will I end up like her? Will I forget myself? Or worse lose myself in the complexities of life.

Three months ago my mother was admitted to hospital, ICU, she hasn't left since. She's since been moved to her own room. A dreadful place with pastel green walls as if adding colour will help to liven up the place. To me it's just a room that's haunted by people in masks. It's quiet in here. I can hear the awkward shuffles of nurses and the occasional weeping soul exiting the building knowing it's the last time they will ever see their loved one. Then there's the sounds of my mother breathing. Slow but consistent, for now. The nurse pops in every now and then, leaving with a sympathetic smile yet never giving any answers.

Answers... something we spend our lives searching for but do we ever really find them? Is the point of life to find answers or live knowing we will never have them?

Three months she's been here. She's moved a few times but this room has been her longest stay. Rarely a face will come by that hasn't seen her in years but claims "we were good friends as kids." Though I've never heard of them. They offer brightly coloured flowers and an embrace but none of this changes things. Other than the strangers nobody visits. I'm here every day. I sit, I listen. The sound of breathing and beeping has become a language I'm now accustomed to. Sometimes I try talk to her and she offers me a wide eyed stare. Other days her eyes are closed and saliva escapes her lips.

This is the reality of what could possibly be the rest of her life.

The doctors are growing less and less hopeful. They have told me "to prepare for the worst." What could be worse than this? A once successful business woman and mother was now spending the rest of her life in a vegetated state comforted by the smell of bleach and cleaning tools.

I took it upon myself to start going through her house. She's never had much, always a minimalist. Never keeping or buying anything she didn't need.

There's a giant wooden box in the corner of her room. It stores her most prized possessions and by this I mean her planners dating back to 1966. She was eighteen years old.

Her planner was pink with purple swirls. Inside, her appointments consisted of ‘dinner party with the girls,’ ‘date with Ben.’

It was simple. There was no scheduled time to wake up, no meetings, no days left to catch up on paperwork. She was carefree and lived governed by no others.

Fast forward to 1986, she was thirty eight years old and still making sure her plans were exactly that, her plans: ‘Get nails done,’ ‘day trip to the beach.’

A few months later I am in the schedule: ‘Ultrasound at 2pm,’ ‘birthing class at 4:30.’ From there less and less plans are for herself. My mother wrote a bucket list beginning in her 1966 planner. Every year she would stick an updated version on the last page, ticking what she had achieved. The bucket list disappeared in 1986, left unfinished.

She gave up her dreams to begin a life that included me.

Left uncrossed on her very last bucket list were:

- Touch the Mediterranean sea
- Visit the colosseum
- Ride in a V8 supercar
- Sky diving

I took a copy of her last list to the hospital with me. Today her eyes were half open somewhere between being awake and asleep. She makes no movement when I walk in. Her position frozen like she is restrained by an invisible straight jacket. Her hair is less messy than usual. I suspect one of the nurses tried to run a comb through her short tattered curls.

I dangle the page in front of her not saying a word. Her eyes glaze over the direction of the page and then close. No reaction. Perhaps she is too far gone to remember her old self.

The person lying in front of me is slowly slipping away. All that is left of the woman she was is this list and the collection of purposeless objects collecting dust in her home. The list is full of adventure and yearns for fulfilment.

“Mum, I don’t know if you remember this list. I hope that you do. I’m sorry you couldn’t finish it.”

I struggle to bring the words out as the patch of drool grows on her white pillow. Hospitals can feel so claustrophobic. It's like the walls are caving in but instead of being crushed by the bricks I feel the weight of every sick soul in the building. I can't be here anymore.

“Mum, I need to tell you something and I need you to listen to me. I'm not going to see you for a while but the nurses will take good care of you. I need to go away but I will come back.”

She finally suggests some sort of understanding. She blinks and looks directly at the list without breaking contact.

“I'll finish your list. I'll see you soon mum.”

I've never had to gather such strength before. Walking out of that room felt selfish. How could I leave her when her days left are few? I don't know if I will ever be able to answer that. All I know is I feel this is the right thing to do. If I can fulfil her dreams, the desires of what she wanted to do in her life, I know she will be able to rest easy.

First on the list: Touch the Mediterranean Sea. I've always wanted to travel but never had the time. Though that's an excuse people come up with out of fear. Perhaps I am fearful. It's a long flight to Nice but that's where the first item will be checked off.

I feel restless on the plane. My skin itches and the light from the tiny screen staring back at me has given me blood shot eyes, I can feel it. Though the never ending flight is like being thrown in a time capsule of awkward moments, uncomfortable seating arrangements and smells, so many smells! I find comfort in the light cloud zipping by almost like the sea itself. My imagination takes me away to the rolling tides and seeing my mother as a young woman itching to just reach out and touch it. But she never does. Her face fades and then her body. All that's left of the image is the pebbled shore and feet. They are my feet, my legs, it's me by the sea.

The loud rumble of the plane landing disturbs me and I am that much closer to my mother's dream.

Escaping the airport I drag my suitcase along the bumpy side walk. I continue walking to my hotel, my suitcase growing heavier and harder to lug over the uneven ground. I see my hotel on the next street. There's a chaotic gathering of cars out the front. One bus tries to park in front of the entrance and the driver gets in an angry scuffle with someone parked in the bus park. I don't understand them but judging by the loud voices and flailing arms it was going to be a while before they reach an agreement.

The sweat is beginning to pour down my face. I feel a patch growing on my back where my backpack is sitting. I feel disgusting. The tiny elevator is little comfort as I squeeze into the corner placing my suitcase on my feet to try make everything fit. The first thing I have learnt is European elevators are tiny!

I press level five and wait for the elevator to make some movement. Room 506, finally air-conditioning. I don't think I have ever felt so relieved. I rip off my sweat stained clothes and sleep.

I must have slept almost 16 hours, by the time I wake it's the next morning. The sun is blaring in through the barely there curtains and I'm blinded by the new day. I didn't think this far ahead. I didn't plan any activities or look up what to see but I figure why not explore the beach today and get mums list started. Task number one: find the map I quickly snatched off reception in my hurry to remove my embarrassingly soaked clothing.

On my journey to the beach I managed to wander through what seemed like a winding maze of streets. Pizza places lined every corner and the main street bustled with people and giant shopping bags. Nice is lively but it isn't as I imagined. I came to France picturing a country of berets and moustaches. Not only are none of these people wearing berets but it's a modern town full of life.

There's a little gelato shop on my way and I can't help but walk inside. One look and I am sold. Nutella flavoured gelato! What more could you want? I quickly eat my gelato and make my way to the beach. A complete contrast from the sandy, quite empty beaches I am used to.

Lines of colourful umbrellas and almost naked people sit in symmetry. The pebbled shore and the illuminate aqua water quickly draw me in. I understand why this made it to the list.

I stumbled to the water my feet sinking in the stones every time I take a step. Note to self: Don't walk this beach bare foot. The Mediterranean Sea, here it is right in front of me. I reach out to touch it and it's surprisingly warm. I jump across some pebbles (still in my shoes) to get closer to the water. Of course I somehow land in a wave and sink my shoes. I guess shopping will have to go on my list now too.

After a busy afternoon hunting for some new shoes and a meal or two along the way I decide to call the hospital.

"She's not doing so well. We've seen a decline over night but we are doing the best we can to keep her comfortable," the nurse spoke.

The nurse put the phone on speaker and I tell mum about my day. I didn't expect a response but felt crushed when all I heard was the silence and then the nurse quickly jumping in to soften the blow.

I couldn't let this slow me down, the quicker I finish mums dreams the quicker I'll be back to tell her about it. In a few days I fly to Rome, a city with so much history and so much to see.

Rome is packed with people all wandering in different directions with no real purpose. Pushing through the bodies is a challenge but I make it to the Spanish Steps which is more like an oncoming wave of people. I keep wandering down the street and come across a monstrous fountain covered in scaffold. It's the Trevi Fountain. How beautiful it would be without the scaffold and with water. I make note to put this on my own bucket list.

I catch the metro to a stop named Colosseo and I arrive just across the road from the Colosseum. I walk just down the street to a small ticketing stall that I have heard allows you to skip the line. I promptly get my ticket, walk straight passed the line of people that would be waiting at least three hours. I go straight to the entrance and I'm in. It's dark inside and a little chilly but light comes through the arches that lead outside.

I follow the crowd outside and once I push through everyone I can see the Colosseum in its entirety. It's not hard to envision what it would have been like. There's a platform to show what level the stage would have been on. I can image the roar of the crowd as people begin to fight. I can see the pain on the fighters face and the blood dripping down their bodies. I can see the desperation side by side with complete brutality.

I find the stairs to climb to the next level. They are steep. I struggle to imagine people climbing them. I heard stories that supposedly civilians were smaller than people today so I wondered how they would have climbed or even built this amazing piece of history. As I reach the outside again I feel a slight breeze cooling my sun burnt face. I close my eyes in complete tranquillity. For a few seconds I'm in my own world. My mother isn't sick and we are on this adventure together. The fantasy doesn't last long until I am interrupted by vibrating in my pocket.

It's the hospital calling.

"Hi, sorry to call again but we wanted to give an update on your mother. She woke for a few minutes and it seemed she was asking for you. It was hard to make out but we explained to her where you are and why. She fell asleep again. A few hours later she declined again, we don't think she will wake. At this point she is no better and we don't see her improving. I'm sorry," the nurse sounded sympathetic and I know she really is sorry. She wants to see me complete this journey almost as much as I want to for my mother.

I leave the Colosseum feeling deflated. Was it wrong for me to have come here in the first place? I left my mother when she was so ill and I knew she wasn't going to last long but I still decided to leave. Maybe it was out of fear, maybe I couldn't stand to see her slowly and painfully grow worse. She had already lost the person she was but I didn't want that to replace the person I remember. Now staying or leaving is my hardest decision.

I spend another day in Rome exploring the ruins and pondering if I should leave. I have been gone for just over a week now and I had ticked off two items, maybe that was enough for now. Exploring the ruins is a little girl in a tiny sun hat holding her mother's hand tightly as she skipped and scuffed her feet through the dirt. That was the moment I felt like I had made a huge mistake. I knew I was crying I could feel it and it wasn't until security asked me if I was okay that I heard it. And what a loud wail it was. Suddenly overwhelmed I pushed past the security guard and ran. I just need to be in silence. I need to come to terms with how selfish I have been leaving her when she needed me most.

The four walls of my hotel room were my sanctuary I must have hid there for days. I sat on the tiny bed watching the sun rise and set in what seemed like one quick motion. The tiny shower provided no relief. From hot to cold the water temperature was as indecisive as I had become.

After an agonising amount of time spent considering my options I decide as painful as it is, home is where I need to be.

The flight home feels endless. I'm agitated I didn't finish the list and nervous to see what my mother will be like. I'm stuck in a middle seat so that makes sleeping difficult. During the night the ceiling of the plane is lit with tiny lights that look like stars. After convincing myself I see a 'shooting star' which is probably just a quick flicker of the lights, I make a wish.

Eventually we land and I advise the taxi driver to take me straight to the hospital.

I wish I had a poetic story to tell, like it was pouring rain and I ran inside. She instantly woke and said my name, she was going to be okay. That's not my story. There's no rain just an average winter afternoon. There's no traffic. I don't hear any interesting stories from the driver just murmurings of the weather. And when I finally get inside she doesn't say my name, she doesn't even wake up.

It's a very anticlimactic end to my journey but this is reality. I wanted so badly for her to be better when I came home. I almost convinced myself into thinking she would be. The wish I made on the plane wasn't going to happen. This is how she would be until it finally ends.

<https://beclawrenceblogging.wordpress.com/>

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Pretty In Pink

Robyn McIntosh

For some women the bright bouquet would have been overwhelming but Susan adored the splash of unusual colours he presented to her when she arrived at the table.

‘I asked the florist to put together a mix of flowers and colours that reminded me of you.’

Susan beamed. She was aware of her childlike tendency to put together odd mixtures of tops and bottoms – whatever made her happy - and it pleased her that he was embracing what she felt was a vital element of her personality. No more neutrals for her. From now on she was being true to herself.

‘Thank you, Tim, I love them. Can we ask the waiter to keep them in water, do you think, until we are ready to leave?’

‘Of course we can.’

He gestured for the waiter’s attention.

‘I wanted to make it up to you for not being able to keep our date on Monday. I’m so sorry that I had to cancel at the last minute. I hated to think of you sitting there alone in the restaurant waiting for me.’

‘Well, you’re very kind and thoughtful. They make me happy.’

‘That’s my job, to make you happy.’

Susan saw that he had ordered himself a margarita whilst he was waiting for her and cheekily she picked up the glass and took a sip at the same moment as she sat down. It was delicious.

‘You like it.’

‘Yes’

‘Waiter, would you please put these flowers in water, and she’ll have a margarita.’

‘Madam, would you prefer it on the rocks, blended, salt or with no salt, fruit flavoured perhaps?’

There were a few moments of uncomfortable silence.

‘Tell him how you like it.’

‘On the rocks please, with salt.’

When the waiter had turned away he put his arm around her in a proprietary way and he spoke to her in a tone that he used when he wanted to tell her something important.

‘It’s a weak drink. You’re perfectly safe.’

His tone had a way of making her melt and it impressed her that he had weighed up the situation and made an accurate assessment. When she was driving she was always careful not to have any alcohol.

Susan was an optimist, even when life had had a way of proving her wrong. She tried hard to wait patiently for something good to happen in her life because she had the strongest feeling that it was just a matter of time before something wonderful would happen. She’d left a job recently that had become an unhappy situation and she’d done that without the security of another position, in spite of her fraught financial situation. Then, the very next day she had secured a brand new exciting opportunity. When she looked at Tim telling her about himself, his bold watery blue eyes peeking out from under his thick eyebrows, she wondered if expressing herself in a completely honest way with him was another chance she had to take. No more hiding, no more denying her true feelings.

‘Horses are different to dogs,’ he was saying. ‘This trainer of mine has been explaining to me about the psychology of horses, which helps when you are learning to ride them.’

‘How are they different?’

‘If you’re not the leader with a dog, the dog takes over. But with a horse, if you don’t act as the leader the horse becomes more and more anxious.’

‘How interesting. I think I connect more to a horse in that case.’

Susan had been a loyal wife and mother. Her father had left her and her mother when she was in her early teens and more than anything she wanted her children to have a secure family life. Long after her ex-husband had stopped wanting to make love to her she'd tried to make the marriage work, until the girls left home and she decided she wanted more out of life. Lately, she'd become aware of a thought that was repeating itself in her mind, refusing to budge. 'I want to know what it feels like to give up control.' Within the confines of her mind she had admitted what she wanted and that was a good start. Could this man give her those kinds of experiences she wondered as she listened to him?

When they reached their respective cars parked beside one another, Tim told her that he would like to make love to her and they travelled home to her place in convoy. It had been so long since a man had explored her body but she instinctively trusted him and wanted him.

He provided her with carnal pleasures completely new to her. She was starting to feel like a woman again, like she had a second chance at love.

A few weekends later Susan opened the door to a laden down Tim. Not only had he brought the ingredients to cook a meal but he had in his right hand a bunch of roses – pink, crème, orange and yellow, all tied up with a particularly long pink bow.

'Oh, darling, they are spectacular. Wherever did you find them?'

'It's a secret.'

'Come in, come in.'

Tim made himself at home in her kitchen, putting the fish into the refrigerator and finding a place for the salad ingredients and the berries whilst Susan transferred the flowers into a blue vase.

'It's a particularly lovely pink ribbon. I don't want to throw it out,' she said to him as she folded up the paper that had wrapped the flowers.

'I'll fold it,' he said, and he put the pink ribbon into his jacket coat pocket while Susan found a place for the vase in the middle of the side table by the window.

'They look gorgeous. You are a lovely man.'

'I know.'

They both laughed and he grabbed her and pulled her towards him.

‘Alas, I’m not always a lovely man.’

‘You’re not?’

‘Sometimes, my appetites lead the way. Now, let me see. What I am going to do with you before dinner?’

‘Do with me?’

‘Mmmmm, I’d like to play with you.’

‘You mean make love to me?’

‘Eventually, perhaps, but I was thinking of a game.’

‘Now I’m curious. What sort of a game did you have in mind?’

Tim scanned the room and set his eyes on a plain, dark wooden seat in the corner of the room. There was a cushion on it and he got rid of that before he brought the chair to the middle of the room.

‘Let’s get these clothes off. They are quite unnecessary.’

He took his time undressing her, peeling off the layers one by one until Susan stood there naked.

‘Beautiful. Sit down, there’s a good girl.’

She’d watched him undressing her in a sort of trance, lifting her foot when he gestured to do so; raising her arms when told, and now she sat perfectly still as if it were the most natural thing in the world to be sitting naked on a little wooden chair in the middle of her living room with Tim watching her. There wasn’t a hint of a protest.

‘Where do you keep the scissors?’

‘Scissors? In the top drawer next to the spoons.’

He retrieved the sharp, metal kitchen scissors. Tim sat down on the sofa. He took out the pink ribbon and cut it in half, leaving one end of the ribbon on the couch and straightening out the other length of pink ribbon between his two hands.

Their eyes met.

‘Little girls need to learn to sit very quietly and still. This exercise will help to train you to do as you are told.’

The words were like a tonic to her hard-wired brain, as if she had been waiting for them her whole life. She felt the reverberations of the sounds they made and so she stayed quiet hoping to hear an echo. ‘...do as you are told’.

Although she was deep in her own head, she didn’t miss the smile at the corners of his mouth, the playfulness in his eyes.

‘Bring your palms together and hold out your hands.’

She did so, much as she brought her hands forward at church to receive the bread and blessing. He tied her wrists together with the pink ribbon, tight, but being careful not to cut off the circulation. With the other end of the ribbon he bound her ankles together in the same way, being sure to create pretty bows.

‘My package. Now, I’m going to prepare dinner and I want absolute silence. Understand?’

Susan began to form the word ‘yes’.

‘No words’

She nodded her head.

‘There’s a girl.’

When the kipfler potatoes were in the oven, the salad was made and the herbs chopped, Tim opened a bottle of Pinot Noir and poured two glasses. He brought them over to the coffee table and he sat down on the sofa, directly opposite Susan.

‘You are very beautiful, Susan. Bright. Witty. Capable.’

Manners demanded that she say ‘thank you’ for the compliment, but before she instinctively enunciated the sounds she saw Tim bring his finger up to his mouth to gesture that she should stay silent.

‘What did I say? No words.’ ‘No words,’ he repeated, more softly this time.

As much as she was responding to the game, enjoying the notion of having an invisible gag in her mouth, Susan found she wanted to talk. There was a tension in the air that she felt she needed to break, a desire to bring it down a notch, to recover a little control perhaps.

Darling, I’m not sure...’

‘Susan, you’ve interrupted me and disobeyed me. A correction so soon. How unfortunate!’

With his long arm he merely had to reach out to find Susan’s nipple. He took it between his fingers and pinched. She drew in her breath and stared at him, confused.

‘Dare to speak now.’

‘Tim!!’

He pinched harder now and she whimpered. He kept his eye on her eyes, looking closely to see if they should water. He put a little more pressure on the nipple and a tear rolled down her cheek. He let go. She breathed out, releasing the tension.

‘You need to resist your impulses, Susan. As I was saying, you’re a bright, capable woman who has been looking after yourself for some years, but it’s clear to me that you need direction. Now, you took your correction well so you may have a sip of wine as a reward.’

Part of her was cross with him and part of her was intensely aroused. The arousal was winning.

Tim brought the glass of wine closer to her face and like a bird waiting to be fed, she opened her mouth.

‘What do you say?’

She gave him a withering stare. If she spoke he'd pinch her nipple again, probably, and if she didn't speak she'd not get any wine.

'Little girl may ask for some wine.'

'Little girl'. That did something very special to her mind.

'May I..'

'May little girl...?'

'May little girl please have some wine?'

She noticed a look on his face, a look of surprise perhaps; surprise that she had managed to speak in the third person with such ease.

'I'm not convinced that little girl really needs wine.'

'Pleeeeeeeese. May little girl please have some wine?'

'Oh, little girl really wants some wine.'

'Yes'

'Yes, what?'

'Yes, Sir?'

'Good girl'

How liberating and soothing it was to hear those words!

'Very well.'

'He brought the glass to her lips and gently upended it so that Susan could take a sip. She accepted it like holy water, like the sacrificial drink that it was, the drink that he had allowed her. She was taking to the game like a pig to mud.

Susan's mind felt as if on an escalator that had quite suddenly lurched down. She was ceding control to him and in the process of that she felt hungry more. The transformation of mind-set had not escaped him.

‘What would my little girl like? Speak up, dear one.’

Susan was well past the point of being coy, or of holding back her desires. She was asked what she wanted and she’d tell him, whether she was granted her desire or not.

‘To fuck’

‘Goodness. Does little girl do that?’

‘*Grown up* little girls do. Little girl wants to be fucked.’

His eyes contradicted the words he was using. ‘Goodness!’ Gentlemen’s words he was using, but his tactics weren’t that of a gentleman.

‘Hmmm’

She rolled her eyes, probably not a good idea, on second thoughts.

‘Daddy thinks that little girl should wait until a more appropriate time.’

He must have the patience of a saint, she thought. She could see his hard cock pressing against his pants and still he feigned ambivalence.

Daddy needs to feed his little girl, and bathe her, of course, and perhaps if there is time before bedtime. We’ll see. Just sit quietly and wait for dinner to be served.’

He left her to her own devices, to the bodily smells wafting up to her nostrils, to her urgent desire to put out the fire that had ignited between her legs, to the desire to wrap her body around him and smother him with kisses; to the desperate need to take his long cock in her hands and suck away on it. Yet, she sat there, primly, hands together, ankles together. She had no choice.

She listened to him in the kitchen, whistling Broadway tunes, frying up the fish. Eventually, he brought over to her a large helping of food on a main course plate and one fork. He sat down on a chair he had placed directly opposite her and smiled.

‘Daddy is *starving!*’

He took several large mouthfuls of the food whilst she watched on, and only then did he allow Susan to eat from the fork he offered her. It tasted more delicious than anything else

she could remember. It tasted pure and lean and wholesome. It nourished not just her stomach but her soul.

‘Good girl. Eat it all up. Little girls need to eat healthy food. Little girls aren’t allowed candy and treats, except on very special occasions. Is that clear, Susan?’

She nodded her head, anything to get another bite of that fish and potato.

When she had had her fill he wiped her mouth clean with a serviette and gave her two more generous gulps of wine.

‘It’s getting late. Let’s get little girl into the bath.’

Susan smiled. Was there no end to this game? Were they playing a game, or had this slipped into their new shared dynamic?

When the bath was filled to about a third of capacity, he undid Susan’s wrists and ankles and took her to the bathroom where he had her stand in the water whilst he washed off the sweat that had formed on her body. He soaped up the white flannel washcloth and brought it up and around her breasts, up and down her arms and legs and back. Then he had her kneel in her bath leaning over and he washed her gorgeous cunts, front and back. She stayed completely still and radiated in the personal attention, even in the humiliation.

When she was all towel dried and her teeth were brushed, he surveyed her.

‘All scrubbed. Good girl. Now, Daddy knows that little girl would like to be fucked. Her cunt is very wet and engorged. But, it has got late and Daddy has some work to do on the computer before he comes to bed.’

She pleaded with her eyes but he’d made the decision to keep her waiting. She could tell.

‘Little girl isn’t going to touch herself, is she? She wouldn’t do that without Daddy’s permission?’

Susan didn’t answer either question. She didn’t think she could promise anything.

‘Hmmm, Daddy is going to have to use the pink ribbon again, tie little girl’s hands together to stop anything naughty happening in bed.’

He retrieved from his pocket one of the pink ribbons and tied her hands together.

‘Into bed’

He brought the covers up high so that she was just peeping out from the blankets.

‘If that pink ribbon should become untied Daddy will be very cross. Disobedience earns a sound spanking. Mark my word, Susan.’

‘Yes, Daddy.’

‘Goodnight.’

‘Goodnight. Darling?’

‘Yes, sweetheart?’

‘I love you.’

‘I love you too, sweetheart.’

He turned off the light. Susan lay in the dark still as a wrapped Mummy. She listened to his footsteps move away from her. His little girl, her Daddy. She’d been waiting all her life for this. It had been worth the wait.

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Lost and Found

Richard Slade

I hate expectations. I have none. I expect nothing from anyone, but everyone has expectations of me.

They all expect me to have money; my girlfriend, my landlord, my dealer. Even that lowlife, Creepy Jules, thinks I should give him money. It's not as if I have never done anything for him, you know, like shared when he was short, or shouted him a drink when I was flush.

But he didn't see me where I was standing in the shadows of the big Plane Tree, on the other side of Oxford Street; he just kept walking, weaving through the Thursday night gawkers, with their money and fancy clothes and loud laughter. It's weird, though, to see Creepy carrying a book bag – one of those cotton ones with Sydney City Library printed on it. Made in China probably, everything else is, even most of the stuff he smokes, snorts, or sells.

I can see him still walking down the one-way lane towards Crown Street. Must be meeting those three blokes waiting down the other end of the lane, though it's funny how he just changed sides to get between the buildings and the cars. He can't be hiding from them, 'cause they waved, and he waved back. No, not hiding – he's still walking down the lane. But where's the bag gone?

There's got to be some sort of deal going down here. Maybe, if it's a good one, Creepy might feel generous. I cut across the street and give the finger to the Taxi blowing its horn at me – you can carry on, bastard, you've got money.

Where's Jules gone? That doesn't look so good. They've got him surrounded, up against a wall. Not hurting him, though, so maybe it's friendly.

Oh, look, he dropped the book bag here in the gutter, half under the car. It would have been flattened if the car had driven away. Be a pity when a book might fetch a couple of dollars up at the exchange.

I keep my head down and scuttle out of the lane, with the bag tucked under my arm. It's not very heavy. There's another lane on the other side where I can have a look without Creepy finding me.

There are two books, held together with big rubber bands, but there's a bit of a gap between them. I ease the rubber bands off and stare. Staring back at me is wad of hundred dollar bills, ten bundles of ten, black and green in the dim light. Ten grand; enough to pay the back rent, the personal loan, the credit card, get Sophie's jewellery back from Cash Converters, and, ha-ha, pay Creepy Jules for the dope he sold me last month.

So, why don't I go home? I've been walking around for over an hour now, the bag small enough to be rolled up under my armpit since I ditched the two books. If I pay everything off, there might be a couple of hundred left, and then, next week, we'll be broke, and she'll start her whining again. But just up this little side lane is a pool of light that is the 'discreet' back door to Falco's casino, and I know their system, how it works, when it is likely to pay. An hour in there, and then back out the door with twenty or thirty instead of only ten, too easy. So, why don't I go in? There's a car coming, so I duck behind the skip bin.

When it leaves, I tuck the bag into my shirt and walk back out into the crowds and the lights of Oxford Street. It feels good to have that money tucked in there, where no one knows about it. I feel powerful, with a secret that they would love to know about. Maybe we could just do a runner and head north. Sophie doesn't like the city in the winter time. Ten grand would set us up somewhere nice, on the coast, where she could go to the beach all year round. It's a nice thought.

And yet, here I am, just up the street from Falco's back door again. There's a shadow within the shadow of the entry way, where one of his big doormen is waiting. A good session in there and I could have five or ten times as much as I started with, too easy.

"You're not a member" the big man says "Can't go in"

I knew he'd say that, and I am ready. I reach into the bag, which is back under my arm. Reaching into my shirt would likely have frightened him and made him do something I wouldn't like. I flash a thousand buck bundle, and push it back into the bag, then smile and raise an eyebrow. I know how to be suave, when I need to.

He scowls, then clenches and raises both fists to his waist, as if he is about to flatten me, and I can't help stepping back. But then he smiles. I've never seen him do that before.

"Welcome, Mr Zac" he says, opening his hands and waving me into the red-lit foyer
"Have a nice night"

I should run. That voice, and the smile, they are happy, but not friendly. There is a front door. I can just keep walking and when I am out of his sight, tuck the bag back into my shirt and just casually stroll out the front door into Oxford Street, easy done.

There's no one at the bar, when I get to the gaming room. Everyone is busy at the tables. I've got enough for a quick drink, and Falco has some of the best imported Bourbons. And they are the best. Expensive, but so smooth that I think my change might stretch to one or two more, while I watch the tables, just for a few minutes, in case one of them looks workable.

Suddenly, there is a presence behind me, a big, heavy presence.

"Zachary Raymond Peterson, a bit expensive for you in here, isn't it?"

I have never met this man before, in his expensive grey suit and dark blue tie, but his grim blue eyes are familiar. I have seen this face, this man, on TV, more than once. He is a famous, sometimes they say 'notorious' detective, and I do not want to get to know him any better. My feet move without my thinking, but my body will not move. Very quietly, another big man in a suit has stepped up close behind me.

"Just a quiet word, Zachary, if you please, in Mr Falco's office, it won't take long"

There is a little smile on the detective's face, though the eyes have not changed. My elbows are gripped tightly, and we are walking to a part of the Casino I have never seen before, along a hall and up some plush stairs. There are doors, some closed, some open, and some beautiful women in fancy dresses and jewels. A big islander in a black suit is waiting at the end of the corridor. He opens the door and I am marched in.

Mr Falco looks happy to see me. I can see the back and one side of Jules' head as he sits, slumped in a chair in front of Falco's desk. Two more bouncers are standing next to Jules, and there is some blood on his temple and shirt. My arms are gripped tighter. The man

from the door has followed us in and is slowly crushing my elbows as the big detective reaches into my shirt and pulls out the bag.

Jules has not looked around, and no one speaks as the detective counts the money before tucking it into a pocket inside his jacket.

"Looks like we owe you a slight apology, Jules" the man says, "though you really need to be a bit more careful with my money in future, it's a hundred short" and he adds, with a nod to the owner, "your drinks are a bit expensive, Falco"

"I will make it up sir" Falco is already pulling money out of his desk drawer, while my hands are developing pins and needles.

"Keep it" the big man says, then reaches out and starts twisting my ear, "and do me a favour, put this garbage where it belongs"

Falco nods, and smiles, and the other two bouncers close in on me.

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A Nudge

Murray Alfredson

A greeting passed from the beyond,
a message through your psychic wife,
a girl whom you had known, not known,
some fifty years before, who told
her friend she thought you physical,
pushes through river-rock-pool mind-
mirror, its head a moment when
seeing her safely through the streets
you did not reach and take her hand
because you loved an absent other,
whom in the end you parted from.

That moment's memory thrusts itself
a water-shedding head that sends
wave-circles spread across the moonlit
to lap at separate times the rockwalls
bounce back across the newer circles
to knock them into glinting ripples:
fading silent echoes of
a might have been.

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Street Stray

Mindy Gill

I am all outdoor thing,
paw-splintered
black-toothed, spilling
guts of rotting fruit
all over kitchen tiles.

I sling slow under yellow
back verandah light.

I do not look
into windows.

I am so bite-you
-on-the-back-of-the-neck
to tell you that I love you, to tell you
Stay.

I've been dragging
around a broken leash
for as long as I can remember.

I wish I were more vermilion lacquer –
less salt-throwing over left shoulder,
less salt dissolving
into ulcer.

I want to be cityscape reflection
fading into river,
something more languid,
more mouth like molasses.

I can't stop baring my teeth
at shadows.

Bellyache

Mindy Gill

I am in love
with a river. I am in love with a river
and the way it splits
this city like a knife
between ribs.

I am in love with a set of ribs
and the body
and the person
they belong to.

I think I do not belong
to this city.

What I am trying to say
is the word *Home*
shouldn't feel like swallowing barbed wire.

What I am trying to say
is one time I wanted
to pay a stranger's bus fare
but then didn't.

I get so chalk and sugar,
so meringue crumbling in fists.

I wish I were rain-sound
a lightning crack,
all electric eel in black water
finding its way home.

The Wayfarer Girl

Joanna Powell

Caught back in a cold pool of air, I see the heroic sunrise. I desired more, but not to catch the lick of the wave to surf to the shore, I floated, out to sea.

Mindful I'm afraid of the cold, I went out. I cast my cold hand on the snow to see straight, my vision impaired my glasses blurry.

Running through patches of terror I ask myself, what are you so afraid of? Do you think that you will fall, slip through the cracks.

My heart lifted when I saw the snow on the mountain. So beautiful like a secret I had to decode. The hills by day follow nightfall and emerge, slanted pastures, silent beneath laminated flakes of smooth, velvet icing.

A stranger to myself. As coils of energy drew a furnace of long days. Now so, a smaller nuance resonates, uncloaked and raw.

I broke my fall slipping through the cracks, and holding on for my life, beneath the floorboards you tread on.

I drove out of the snow. Still cold in the shadows of the trees, but I am craving something that I have been absent from. Life. A desire, not to be found but to be lost. Anonymous and forgotten, and running, far away from the chains that pull to the wheel of formation.

This country air, so surrounds my vision, fills my lungs, impairs the logic and I renounce this heaving oxygen that dissipates in the sheer cold.

So now, I carry a flame, and you will see it in the snow. Where you thought no one would wander, where you thought I'd dare not go. I have found a trail, so despatched it moves unrecognisably toward a forest of black charm. See the scratches on my arms. See the bruises on my knees and the rose reflection of campfires on my cheeks.

I have brought myself forward to you, Desire. Catch me, charm and entice my sight.

I run out, with swarms of eagles that need not your approval or care for your call. The hammers that build, the drums that beat, and the feet that dance lure in droves, to bask in the twilight of your song.

Is it not true, for that the soul will find its way from the black cavernous night, to the seeping electronic signal, mastering return, guiding wild horses and drawing energies into the hum, that resonates to the tone of desire.

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i begin the year with infatuation

Michelle Wang

i begin the year

with

infatuation.

i am cut, cragged, cavernous

help me

find me

i am scabbing from the inside

forming a permanent crust over the pinprick hole bleeding bubbling fevered salty stains.

gladly let it heal then

gladly be kind to your whimpering whippet flinging flailing core;

the flimsy fibred stone of a plum tumbling falling through endless space.

but claw harder and feel something

dig your nails underneath

and peel away the fake wholeness

drip

drip

drip.

i begin the year with

infatuation.

not love (not love?)

that ghastly grandiose thing.

before i began bleeding and drying out in the dust i lied and dyed my lips redder than my heart; a clandestine hoax inside the black sky.

leave me please

leave

i am running away running running away running away

matted hair but no tears

never tears

no love no tears no love no tears

sleepless helpless fightless reckless rien d'anglais rien rien desolé blind flare of white white
light-

god? i laughed:

i am discovered, hollowed out shell hazelnut husk waiting to be walked over and released
squeezing out high pitched steam in a viscous clear stream.

i begin the year with infatuation.

i want-

hands, not my own

sketching the lands and oceans and lakes and mountains rippling cold cool clarity in forward
motion no cycles no repeat (acrid taste and varicose veined gaze) repeat nothing except for
night

i want- wanted-

glass broke

when we tried the needle pricking the ceiling so that it sagged; sinking consciousness in a
moroccan chandelier floating taunting spinning bokeh never an end again

no beginning and no end

(drip drip drip)

another almost another waste of breath another wasted night

i am scared of how long the drop is how long it takes for a scab to form how long i-

ziiiiiiiiiiip

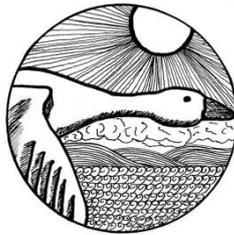
no drip.

this is how i begin and how i end

(drip) zip.

<http://salutmarinnn.blogspot.com/>

Contents



The Wild Goose Literary e-Journal

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<http://nataliemuller.weebly.com/the-wild-goose-literary-e-journal.html>

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