

Joshua

Before we thought of it for you, we had hardly used the word. We tried it in our own mouths, the roundness, the swoosh, the up and down of it.

Three strong syllables. We called it from ladder height as we turned the back room into your room. We spoke it in the womb of our car. In the lifts

and corridors of the hospital, we tossed it to each other, and, in the still morning of the sixth day of the twelfth month, we whispered it to you.

You outstripped this long name, abandoned two-thirds of it, settling for the onomatopoeia of your loud days, hours of bursting activity

and talk, until the final collapse when you sank onto anything, the explosion of energy dissipating into the crumpled heap of a sleeping toddler.

The word became everyone's. Your mates kicked it round the schoolyard, put it on hold for cruder nick-names. Girls gossiped it.

Sometimes the whole word of your name is brought out for special occasions. It falls and rises, like a path of life. And then it was she trying out its shape,

testing its rhythm. Now she speaks your name, whispers its softness, laughs its joy, states its strength. Calling you, she reminds us of who you are.

Found Recipe

On the edge of this template of shiny leaves
on wet black bitumen, a fragment of paper
disturbs the storm. I pick it up, note its contents.

*Rocket, mushrooms, pine nuts, cucumber,
lemon, fetta ¼ piece, cheery (sic) tomatoes,
two candles.* I glance at the houses and wonder

if somewhere a sad salad of guessed ingredients
is being served. I pocket the fragment and later
take it shopping. That evening the sky rages.

We sit by candlelight, our plates brim with rocket
salad. We give thanks for the bounty, spare a thought
for the household eating in the dark.

In Praise of the Colorbond Fence

I have noted *Colorbond* fences slicing urban neighbourhoods and wondered if the local planners thought *The Australian Ugliness* was a “how to” manual.

When it was our turn to move into one of these suburbs, the City Council insisted we could not have a ti-tree fence not even a row of tidy pickets, and the fence was to be beige.

The fencers installed the posts, screwed on the flat steel walls, capped the posts. I became sixteen again, an angsty teenager hitching her dress high outside the bound of the front gate.

I planted found objects close to the fence, draped ceramics, encouraged the trespass of vines. A clutter of bikes and bins, the dark squat of compost carrel and worm farm lined its edge.

Now my yard is full of us. Borders of healthy natives fight out the drought. Rusty mesh blooms, a scramble of roses over its frame. A scatty vege-patch yields bumper crops

of potatoes, paper dry lettuces, pegs and dog bones. We sit in the square of sun, slurping on home-grown peaches, tossing scraps to the birds, scraps of humour to each other.

A circle of us squared in tight, a suburban amphitheatre separating the ticket holders from the passers-by, the easy recklessness of our days bordered in *Colorbond* beige.

Saturday Morning Circles

sparkling oval glaze
frost stamped green with forty-four
tiny soccer boots

peeling off the point
double overhead barrels,
get me out there now

weekend graffiti
red texta rings of hope; jobs
houses, cars, travel

latte glasses bound
in tight white skirts. Their lips kissed
with vivid red gloss

The Poem

When you call me and tell me we should catch up,
fear seeps into me as I weigh possibilities
that might cause a 20 year old to need his Mum.

I consider girls and finance and substances
in that order, so when we meet and you pass
a poem to me, I am awestruck.

I read it again and again. Clauses sing in my ears,
images hang in my brain but you are not satisfied.
You want words to work with and against.

We talk into the night. Next day you ring, message,
email me. I push phrases through my head, filter
them to you. Each time you reject my offering.

It is as if a long time ago, you were given the precise
set of words for this task. Now you've misplaced them.
I search as I once did for your first tooth, the missing

project, your left shin pad. You cannot let go.
Your need becomes everything. For weeks
you shuffle syntax, scatter similes, scramble

through the linguistic corridors of your youth,
searching for those bright coins of language
that will slot precisely into the gaps of your poem.

Maisie and The Black Cat Band

Everyone remembers a night at *The Palais*.
First kiss in the stairwell. Dancing till doors
closed and then some, learning to ride a bike
on the dance floor, the night she performed
before she was famous, when he went home
with his date's best friend, that Canadian
group who did three encores, the night they
heard that outrageous football poem for the
very first time. But what I want to hear
are the Palais stories about Maisie McNair.

I want to know that the little girl sent to boarding
school when her parents died, and who spent all
those hours practising scales and arpeggios, had
some fun with her deft fingers and her perfect ear.
I want to believe that when Maisie was abandoned
by her war-damaged husband, she leapt at the chance
to set up a band, that it wasn't just the few shillings
she needed for the children, but the thrill of *The Palais*,
of getting the crowd going, of playing alongside
sax and drums, of knowing it would happen again.

I want someone to tell me about the sparkle in her eye
as she looped her lipstick onto the circle of her mouth,
to give me the swishing sound of her dress as she
and the German Shepherd she kept for protection,
strode along Main Road. I want to hear her calling
her band members into perfect pitch with her sure voice.
Give me a picture of her sitting at the piano, her eyes
alive to the dancers, her fingers light on the keys,

answering requests with a single finger tapping a bar or two and then her hands leaping at the ivory.

Let me hear *The Rose of Allendale* ring through the Palais as she gives the romantics the waltz they crave. When they are cheek to cheek and hardly moving at all, let me picture her sending a wink to Norm on sax and Dunc on drums, so that in an instant, she sets the lovers apart by pounding out *the wearing of the green*, and then upping the tempo from Waltz to Charleston to Swing until unable to move another step, they clap for mercy. Let me witness the unfazed musicians playing on and on, until the cheering of the crowd is louder than Maisie and her Black Cat Band.