

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF AUSTRALIAN WRITERS QUEENSLAND (FAWQ)

This edition of SCOPE magazine is volume 71 No. 6

SCOPE

December/January edition

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Premier Networking Event.

Writing History

With Acclaimed Author

Jane Smith

BOOK NOW!

Support the FAWQ Authors

Read their

- **Short Stories,**
- **Flash Fiction**
- **Poetry**

And vote for you favorites.

The theme is

‘New Beginnings’

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FAWQ

Fellowship of Australian Writers
Queensland

Supporting emerging writers since 1921

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Office bearers for FAWQ 2024:

President	Dr.Jim Page.	president@fawq.com.au
Secretary	Lexcia Dalton	secretary@fawq.com.au
Treasurer	Virginia Miranda	treasurer@fawq.com.au
Webmanager	Russell Perry	webmanager@fawq.com.au
Scope Editor	Sally Eberhardt	editor@fawq.com.au
Functions Manager	Rosalie Webb	functions@fawq.com.au
Functions Manager	Verity Croker	functions@fawq.com.au

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SCOPE Editors

Russell Perry editor@fawq.com.au

Sally Eberhardt editor@fawq.com.au

SCOPE is a bi-monthly magazine, depicting all things literary, from Members' writings to articles and information for writers and readers.

Featuring stories, poetry and articles submitted by FAWQ members.

SCOPE is published by the Fellowship of Australian Writers - Qld.

The Fellowship is dedicated to the nurturing and support of writers of all ages and levels, bringing them together in a connected community since 1921.



Join the Fellowship to immerse yourself in the Queensland writing community and become eligible to submit your work for the chance of publication.

[Click Here](#) to Join or renew.

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Editor's Notes.

MEMBERS:

Please feel free to submit your recent achievements or milestones, as well as letters to the editor regarding points of interest, events or suggestions. We will attempt to fit them in. Please insure that these are submitted by the 15th of the month before each issue. That is:

February/March -15th January

April/May — 15th March

June/July —15th May

August/September—15th July

October/November—15th September

December/January—15th November.

Short stories, flash fiction, poetry and articles can be submitted at any time, as, if they miss an issue, they can be considered for the next.



JOIN WITH US AT FAWQ

AND HAVE YOUR WORK PUBLISHED

[CLICK HERE](#)

[Click Here for Submission Guidelines](#)



Members: Christmas Edition Writers' Competition.

Don't forget to vote for your favorite entry in each category. The winners will receive a \$100 prize for each category

The theme is 'New Beginnings'

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From the President's Desk.

Recently I visited the Logan Bookfest, in SE Queensland (I should acknowledge that members of the FAWQ Management Committee were also in attendance and for much longer than I). The Bookfest is basically a large hall at the Beenleigh Showgrounds, where authors set up books on allocated tables, and then sit behind the display, to talk with the public and potentially make sales. It's a great idea for promotion, in effect bypassing the corporate publishing industry through direct contact.

One of the things I like about such events is the opportunity to talk informally with authors, who are invariably interesting people. One such author I met was still a teenager. She indicated that she had suffered from anxiety growing up and that writing was her way of dealing with this. She had published a fantasy novel and was at the Bookfest to publicize this. I was so impressed and told her so. She was and is a courageous young woman. It prompts me to think about how FAWQ might generally support young writers, such as the author of the fantasy novel.

Thanks to those who attended the recent FAWQ author event with former police officer and now crime writer Jack Roney. He's an engaging speaker, interesting not the least for his insights into marketing writing. Our next author event (20 February) features Jane Smith, who has written a book about a woman transported as a convict to the penal colony in Sydney Town, and then further transported (twice) to the penal colony at Moreton Bay. It's a fascinating insight into a brutal part of Australian history, as well as an insight into the personal courage that this brought forth.

Thanks to all the Management Committee and the wider FAWQ community for generous support throughout this year. Remember there is a special discount for membership renewals before the end of the year and that members are also entitled to a free profile webpage on the FAWQ website, featuring your book covers, links to your purchase platform, Social Media pages, personal posts etc. This is a great opportunity to highlight publications, and it's surprising, despite the vagaries of the internet, how often such webpages will be picked up in online searches.

All the best for the Christmas Season and for 2026.

Regards, (Dr) Jim Page, President FAWQ.

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Image by [Prawny](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Members Achievements.

Congratulations to Jo Skinner

Longlisted in the Sydney Hammond Memorial Short Story Competition for 'Remembrance Day'.

Jo has also been busy interviewing for her latest book '[A World of Silence](#)' with author events in Brisbane and further afield including Sydney and Canberra.

Congrats to Mocco Wollert. Continuing achievements each month.

Achievements – Milestones – November 2025

Your Time Magazine:

Column – Velcro November 2025

Senior Digest USA

Column – Massages November 2025

Poem – Where love is November 2025

The Write Grapevine

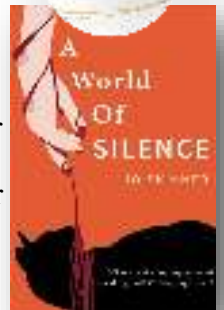
Poem – Winter Song November, December Edition 2025

Congratulations to Caboolture Writers Link

On the publication of their 2025 Anthology, 'Python Tales'.

Wayne Brown (RIP) - Poetry
 Author Foo - Fiction
 Bakthi Ross - Poetry
 Belinda Janz - Free Verse / Fiction
 Carolyn Knox - Non-Fiction
 Debbie McCurry - Memoir
 Dennis Dickens - Fiction
 Ken Nolde - Non-Fiction
 Janet Bestman - Poetry
 John Nolan - Poetry / Comedy

Judith Boyd - Memoir
 Lexcia Dalton - Fiction
 Marti Kari - Free Verse
 Maurice Hardy - Fiction
 Merrill Morton - Fiction / Poetry
 Peter Carseldine - Poetry / Fiction
 Richard Winn - Fiction
 Russell Perry - Fiction
 Sue Henninger - Poetry.



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Jack Roney – Crime Writing Presentation.

Event review and photograph by Sally Eberhardt



FAWQ had the pleasure of hosting crime fiction writer and podcast co-presenter Jack Roney at the November Gathering at Redcliffe Library.

Jack treated us all to insight into his journey from 33 years in the Queensland Police to swapping his badge and gun for the life of a fulltime author. His experiences as a patrol officer, detective, media and communications officer, strategic policy officer and multi-disciplinary instructor stand him in good stead to bring authenticity and realism to his writing.

What Jack was too humble to say is that while that was a good grounding, a hefty dose of imagination and creativity, along with a determination to develop his writing craft, has brought him to where he keeps readers engaged and wanting more.

While Jack has a Graduate Certificate in Writing Editing and Publishing, he is continuing his education and currently studying for his Masters in Creative Writing - a great reminder to us all to never stop learning.

He has also entered quite a few awards with notable results including his first novel being shortlisted in the Watpad

Awards, and runner-up in the Hawkeye Manuscript Development Award which led to a traditional publishing contract.

Amongst the wisdom Jack shared with us were nuggets like 'rather than write what you know, write what you FEEL' and the difference in reader expectations between true crime and crime fiction. He is also an advocate of networking and forging relationships with people across all walks of life.

You can learn more about Jack, his books and his podcast at jackroney.com.au/

A big thank you to Jack for sharing his journey thus far – we learnt so much that will be helpful on our own journeys. Thanks also to FAWQ Function Managers Verity Croker and Rosalie Webb, for organising this event and to Russell Perry for promoting. Thanks too to Lexcia Dalton for the excellent catering – especially the scones which Jack particularly appreciated.

Keep an eye out for our events in 2026. These workshops and presentations are what FAWQ is all about - providing resources, connections and opportunities to help writers of all levels to achieve their dreams.

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Fellowship of Australian Writers
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Fellowship of Australian Writers
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FAWQ Special Event.

FAWQ Gathering: Saturday February 28th 2026:

Between 2 P.M. and 4 P.M.

Meet acclaimed Historical Fiction author Jane Smith as she discusses the connections between fiction and non-fiction when writing historical stories.

2 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Followed by lucky door prizes, afternoon tea, and networking @ Redcliffe library meeting rooms

BIO:

I am a librarian/archivist, author and editor with a love of history. I write fiction and non-fiction for adults and children. Four of my books have been short- or long-listed for literary awards. Most recently, my 'Ship of Death: the tragedy of "The Emigrant"' was shortlisted for the 2021 Frank Broeze Memorial Maritime History Book Prize. My non-fiction 'Captain Thunderbolt' was shortlisted for an ABIA in 2015, 'Shoot-out at the rock' (the first book in my children's historical fiction series 'Tommy Bell, Bush-ranger Boy') was on the Children's Book Council of Australia's 'notable' list of 2017, and 'The Runaway' was shortlisted for a Speech Pathology Book of the Year Award in 2019. I enjoy public speaking and have experience in talking to groups of children and adults.

Entry is \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members

[Click here for Details and booking.](#)



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Fellowship of Australian Writers
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Christmas Writing Competition

‘New Beginnings’

Short Stories.

Below you will find links to each Short Story submitted by members.

Once you have read them, if you would be so kind, please vote for your favorite.

Please vote before 12 midnight on the 15th December

Just click the button below to go to the Voting Form.

[Seductive Rupture](#)

[The Genie in the Bottle](#)

[Freedom](#)

[A Door Closes: Another Opens](#)

[The New Reality](#)

[The Golden Belly-Button](#)

[Melting Moments](#)

[Second Time Lucky](#)



**Click to vote for your favorite
Story, Flash Fiction or Poem**

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Christmas Writing Competition

‘New Beginnings’

Flash Fiction.

Below you will find links to each Flash Fiction Stories submitted by members.

Once you have read them, if you would be so kind, please vote for your favorite.

Please vote before 12 midnight on the 15th December

Just click the button below to go to the Voting Form.

[The New Boyfriend](#)

[By Any Other Name](#)

[Subtract And Add](#)

[The New Gloria Soames](#)

[The Altercation](#)

[The Arrival](#)

[Character Assassination](#)

[Christmas 74'](#)

[Best Laid Plans](#)

[The Web of Dreams](#)



Click to vote for your favorite
Story, Flash Fiction or Poem

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Christmas Writing Competition

‘New Beginnings’

Poetry

Below you will find links to each Poem submitted by members.

Once you have read them, if you would be so kind, please vote for your favorite.

Please vote before 12 midnight on the 15th December

Just click the button below to go to the Voting Form.

[Budgie to Falcon](#)

[No More](#)

[Calliope Dawn](#)

[Tattoo](#)

[New Rain](#)

[Immersion](#)

[From impermanence to New Beginnings](#)

[In the Morning](#)



**Click to vote for your favorite
Story, Flash Fiction or Poem**

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The Case for eBooks.

As a reader or a writer.



The conjecture continues ... Which is best? A printed book or an eBook?

Readers:

if you haven't done so already, find the joy and convenience of carrying a library in your pocket or bag.

As an avid reader from a young age, I've always been a fan of the printed version, for varying reasons.

- Nostalgia
- The smell
- The look and feel of the book.
- Browsing book shop shelves.
- etc.

Then, as a writer, for research and marketing, I had a good look at eBooks and I found that they had some very compelling advantages if you are an avid reader.

- **You can download an Amazon Kindle reader to your phone or tablet for FREE**, with direct access to millions of books and authors, directly onto your Smart Phone, tablet or Kindle . (For those who have never looked into this, I'll give instructions at the end of the post).
- **eBooks are way cheaper than their printed counterpart.** In fact you can find thousands of FREE eBooks for your library. Many great authors will promote their books by giving an e version away for a limited time, particularly if it's the first in a series and they have just released another in the series. Also a less expensive way to explore new authors.
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- **You don't need a light to read by**, your phone is back lit.
- **It's easy to read in bed, at the doctors, on the train, when you travel.**

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Writers:

Some great advantages exist for writers publishing in eBook.

- Shorter stories are surging in popularity currently, particularly in eBook version. Readers are seeking 'Short Reads' for many reasons in this fast moving age. Among them Time efficiency and instant gratification. Amazon have a new category of publications now called 'Kindle Short Reads' - Word counts between 5,000 and 20,000 are popular.
- Readers are more inclined to try new authors at low cost.
- A writer can develop a body of work quickly with low word count publications.
- These short publications cost little to give away for promotional purposes, say for collecting emails for email marketing.
- You can sell these ebooks from you website without holding stock.

Click for more on 'short reads'



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NEW BEGINNINGS - 8 SHORT STORIES

SEDUCTIVE RUPTURE

“Yes I hear you; how can a rupture which is normally such a painful event be seductive? Just wait, and you will understand”.

I am sitting on my balcony, alone. I am talking to you, my reader, to ask you to be patient, so I can tell you a story. A story of hope, love and belief in the goodness of our world. Despite everything. My true story.

Once upon a time, I was younger, stronger, living in a beautiful seaside town called Hopes Point. It was a difficult time; I had recently come out of a very destructive marriage, and I needed time and silence to lick my wounds, alone. A migrant, with no family. Sadly, I have never quite mastered the Australian culture of being part of a community, screaming at sport games, sharing a plate around a BBQ. My accent was still very pronounced, and I did not have many friends. A bit of a loner, I would say.



One day I was sitting out by the ocean, looking through some old albums. Oh, those days when Aron and me were still happily married, camping on the top of Ayers rock (as it was then called), playing tennis, on the Lake Eyre one week and swimming in it the next. There are the good memories I hang on to. I just love this Australian wild wonderland, don't you?



Then my phone rang, an unexpected phone call from a friend. His neighbours have been shooting kangaroos on their farm and killed a wombat by mistake. Checking her pouch, a tiny baby wombat was found. It needed a mother and a home. My friend thought we could help each other. I was unable to say “no”. Saying YES, opening up, and loving, these are the keys that will unlock the prison doors of any sadness I feel.

And so the baby was delivered and I will never forget the day I adopted it. I craved to be a good mother. To a wombat, well, a mother is a mother.

A nervous and somehow apprehensive me was rushing around, preparing to embrace our new life, with this 4-6 months newborn. I wanted so much to ensure that it will be warm and safe.

I remember how I was scared as well as excited, when I accepted the box from my friend and took it into the bedroom. Placing the little wombat into one of my woolen hats, and then directly on my skin, so it could hear my heart beat. I kissed its pink ears, stroked its back, whispered “*You are so special*” and went back to my work in the garden

By midday I had Gypsy's bottle ready; The local vet had everything for me and also printed out some instructions. I checked with the book again, making sure I was not making any mistakes, no, all was well. Gypsy, the wandering wombat, I called it. The vet told me it was a male, so the **it** was replaced with **he**. It felt so crazy, and funny, when I was gently wiping Gypsy's bottom with short strokes so that he was finally able to relieve himself. (It would be his biological mum's duty).

As weeks went by I kept him well fed and very clean, but I could not keep my cottage clean. The wombat loved eating Wheat-Bix while running around, as well as grated carrots, grated apples, and later, grass. Also, he enjoyed chewing my shoes, and yet, I remained patient... I started to wear my long leather boots. At 50, with no family, this was my one and only chance of motherhood, I knew.

Months passed, one day he measured 30 cm in length and hardly had any nails and all too soon his claws become dangerous and sharp items not to be played with! Soon he was eating large bags of grass that I brought home every day. There was I, stopping by the road and picking up grass for my wombat, people just stared, but I did not care. In the mornings, he was allowed to run around in the bedroom, jump/crawl & pull himself up onto the bed, nibble at my slippers, floor rugs, hide in the cupboards and finally, exhausted, settle into my arms for his bottle. What a life. Yet his growth was very slow, and his toilet training even slower, and after about seven months Gipsy was spending more and more time in the gardens. I built him a lovely big "house", but he refused to live in it; I fenced in a huge enclosure, where he could learn how to dig burrows and do other things wombats do, but he escaped from there when he got bored. The only place he liked was the cottage, our home. I finally succeeded in training him to do the toileting in the garden, by standing over him, with a long, large skirt, so he could feel totally protected. Another good tip from the book on how to raise orphan wombats.

Months went by and Gipsy was growing and I started to take him more and more into the bush, slowly trying to prepare him for independence in the wild.

Then came a horrible day when he just disappeared. I searched for Gipsy everywhere, he was playing in the gardens one minute and next minute he was gone. I thought, maybe he has found a young female? It has happened in the past that he would hide for a couple of hours but he always reappeared when I called him. Finally, after searching everywhere, I suddenly heard a tiny little noise from a hole under some old trees, and as I crawled under, I saw my poor baby bleeding and dirty, hardly moving. It must have been a fight over territory with a bigger wombat. Silly me had hoped that bigger wombats would be kind to him. I just cried, took him to the vet and carried out his instructions. I guess Gipsy just wanted to play with other wombats without knowing anything about marking the territory and the rules of the big males. I knew something had to be done.

The local animal park had wombats, devils, and many other animals in beautiful large enclosures, I therefore asked them for help. "He must not be left alone" I told them and they promised. Every day I spent some time with him in his new home, but by 5th day, he was gone. Dugged a tunnel and disappeared into the night. The zoo owners were very apologetic: nobody quite knew what to do with him next. Too small to be left in the wild, and too big to be staying with me in the cottage.



Luckily they found him not far from the fence the next day. And thankfully, he did not cross the road, every day we saw so many wombats and devils killed by cars.

John, the owner of the zoo, had a brilliant idea and put Gypsy with a very young female into a new enclosure.

WOW, I was no longer needed. Sitting on the grass on the outside of the fence, I watched the two get to know each other. This was all new adventure, this was fun; a companion, a safe place, plenty of food, the thrill of new bonding. I was content: It's good, the safety of an enclosure, while they are both young, but the real life is out there, in the beautiful wild bush. I was sure the pair will soon be digging the tunnel to move out. And I imagined our relationship as a rupture, between a wombat and his human adoptive mum, but filled with seductive longing to run and be wild with his new wombat female mate. Will he remember the silver laughter I always had, when chasing him around the cottage? I will feel his warm furry body for as long as I live, knowing very well that the new beginnings are the healthy way forward.

On the 24th December, I took two carrots to their enclosure, the Christmas gifts they devoured in a second. I sat by their fence reading a book on orphan wallabies, it was my next volunteer rescue. Being from Iceland, the tradition called Jolabokaflói (the Christmas book flood) was deeply ingrained in me. Christmas eve is spent reading new books together so I was reading my new book in

the company of my Gypsy and his new mate. One last look: The old eucalypt shone towards the setting sun, and a bright Carpe Diem* for us all.

*Seize the moment



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The Genie in the Bottle

(NEW Beginnings)

'I want a perfume that's like my lady friend,' I say.

'You're a serious guy, Prof,' she says. 'Is your lady like you?'

'Not at all. She's bubbly and always ready for a laugh.' I want to add very like you but hold back. I do not wish to seem too forward. Not before I get to know her better.

She rubs her nose as she surveys her wares. 'I might have just the thing. A special perfume for a special lady.' The bottle she offers is pale pink like her cheeks. 'Handcrafted by yours truly.'

I squint at the label. 'Genie. What's special about it? It looks like the bottle my eyedrops come in.'

She grins, showing two crooked canines, more charming than Hollywood straight white teeth. 'It *is* like your eyedrops. Makes your vision clearer.'

'How?'

'Give it to your lady and see what happens.'

'Can I smell it?'

'Sure.' She sprays a few drops on a scent strip and hands it to me.



Image by [Виолета Пиронкова](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The perfume smells of warm earth and gum leaves, like the bush of my childhood.

'What's the damage?'

'Ninety dollars.'

'You're joking. Seventy.'

'You're looking at an original. Eighty-five.'

'Seventy-five. That's my last offer.'

'You drive a hard bargain.' She covers the bottle in bubble wrap and pops it into a paper bag. 'Good luck. Remember, no returns, no refunds.'

I return a week later. 'The genie's powers didn't work.'

'Genies aren't infallible. Their powers ebb and flow like the waves of the sea. What did you want the perfume to do?'

'Help me to start getting to know her better.'

'Then you need something else. Find out more about what she likes.'

'I think she likes the sea.'

'Try this one.'

The amber bottle is flecked with gold like her eyes. The scent strip exudes aquatic notes, brine and coconut. 'Do *you* love the sea?' I ask.

'I'm no sailor but I don't mind the beach. That's how I created Aquatica.'

'Aquatica it is then. Give me a fair price.'

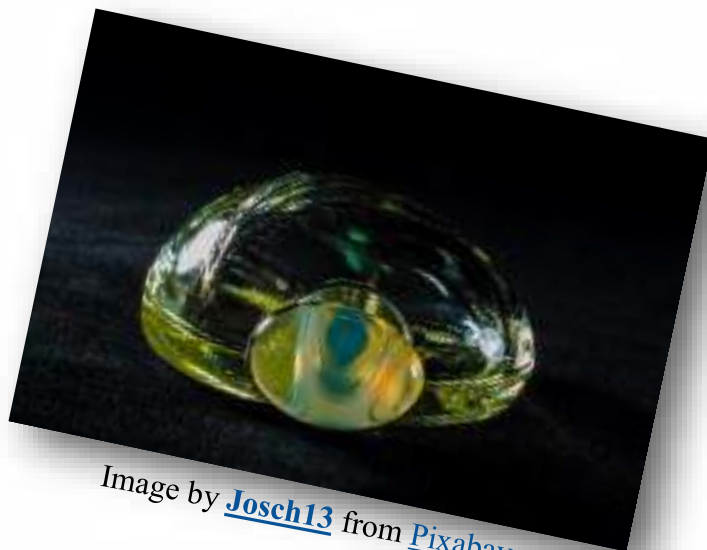


Image by [Josch13](#) from [Pixabay](#)

We agree at sixty since this is my second purchase from her.

Summer descends on us in all its fury and glory. I resist the temptation to wipe the tiny droplets trickling down her forehead.

‘No luck Prof? Your lady is hard to please.’ She cocks her head. ‘I’d be happy if I had a feller like you buying me perfumes.’

My pulse races. ‘Give me a perfume you’d like me to buy for you.’

Burning Cherry smells of ripe mangoes, peaches and cherries, red and luscious, like her lips now curved into a smile. And a faint whiff of smoke like bonfires.

This time we do not bargain. ‘Fifty for you. I’m shutting up shop.’

I do not take the bottle she offers. ‘Does this mean you won’t return?’

‘Course I will. This is just for the Christmas break.’

‘What will you do?’

‘Sit on the beach and watch the waves. Think of some new perfumes. What about you? Anything special planned with your lady?’

‘Only if she agrees. I haven’t asked her as yet. I’m scared of what she might say.’

She laughs. ‘Not all the perfumes in the world will help you win your lady.’ She holds out her hand. ‘C’mon Prof, spit out what you’d like to say.’

I clasp her hand with both of mine. The bottle grows warm in the nest we’ve made. ‘Will you sit on the beach, sip some wine and forge a new dream time with me?’



Freedom

(New Beginnings).

Bennett!” The prison guard called his name without looking up from his paperwork.

Harry rose from his seat and sauntered over to the desk. Although he was being discharged from prison after 25 years, he didn’t feel elated or liberated in any way. There was no one waiting for him outside and, at 64 years of age, all he could foresee was a long, lonely road back, if he wanted anything resembling a normal life.

The guard pushed a bag containing his meagre belongings through the gap under the steel bars on the desk and presented a form for him to sign.

“Congratulations Harry, enjoy your Freedom old timer.”

Freedom? Harry thought. He was jailed, it seemed like a lifetime ago, for second-degree murder, after beating a man to death. The man killed Harry’s wife in a drunken, hit-and-run accident and escaped justice because they couldn’t prove that he was driving the speeding car. To add to Harry’s overwhelming grief, the man grinned sardonically at him as he was freed from the court after the decision, high-fiving his friends around him.

Harry followed him to his celebration party at a nearby pub, storming in, before unleashing all his anger and grief upon him, and before patrons were able to pull him off, his wife’s killer was dead.

Now, as he walked through the prison gates, shading his eyes from the bright sunlight, Harry thought of that word, freedom, again. What was freedom after all? Even though he was out from behind the prison walls, he still had to jump through their hoops. Report to his parole officer every week and, if he was going to stay in the halfway house, take any job they sent him to. He thought that he would be better off in prison. At least he knew what he needed to do to avoid trouble, and he had three meals a day, people to talk to; he even made friends in there. Out in the real world, there was nothing and nobody to go to.

After he was sentenced, his in-laws had taken custody of his 4-year-old daughter, and, after the first couple of years, they stopped visiting and bringing her to see him. They moved interstate, and there wasn’t a letter or any contact for some 18 years. He had no other family and was all alone in a world that still controlled him.



As he waited on a bench outside the prison walls for the bus that would take him to the halfway house, he thought of that word, freedom, as lyrics from an old Kris Kristofferson song came to mind, appropriate words for his situation.

Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.

Nothin’, it ain’t nothin’, if it ain’t free.

As he pondered his prospects for the future, a Mercedes SUV drove into the carpark and stopped a few yards from him. An attractive young woman alighted from the vehicle and unbuckled a small boy from his child seat in the back. She straightened his clothing and ran her hand over his hair before turning to face Harry.

“Harry Bennett?” She asked hesitantly.

Harry stood for a moment, looking first at the woman, then at the child, before replying with equal hesitancy, as he clutched his bag of belongings closer to him. “Yes ... yes that’s me.”

The woman came slowly toward him. There were tears in her eyes, and her words were a sob now. “I’m your daughter Lucy,” then pushing her son gently to the front, managed to say through her tears, “and this is your grandson, Sam.”

Harry just stood dumbfounded. “But how... who...”

Image by [Wolfgang Eckert](#) from [Pixabay](#)

“Grandma passed last week and before she died, she told me the truth about you. They always told me that you were dead. I contacted corrections and they told me that you were to be released today. I’m so sorry Dad, I would have visited sooner if I had known the truth. I’m so sorry you’ve had no one for so long.”

She came to him and, dropping her son’s hand momentarily, hugged him as she sobbed into his shoulder.

The bus arrived, and Harry pulled away from her and looked up as his name was called. He turned back to Lucy, and now tears filled in his eyes. “I’m sorry, I have to go with them. Can I see you later?”

Lucy put her hand on his arm, “No, you don’t have to go with them,” she looked to the guard showing him a piece of paper, “I have this from the corrections department,” then turning back to Harry, “you can come home with us now, we have a flat out the back of our house for you. You can live with us.”

The guard read the paper and looked at Harry for his decision. Harry nodded through the tears, and the guard returned to his bus with the other parolees.



By now Ethan, Lucy’s husband, had parked the car and joined them. He extended his hand to Harry. “Hello Mr. Bennett, I’m Ethan. Lucy told me all about what you have been through, and we will be honoured to have you live with us. We have a large home with a flat for you at the back. I own a construction business, so if you want to work, you can work for me, but there is no need, your home is with us now.”

That night as Harry lay on his bed, in his new home, he reflected on his thoughts of that morning, that freedom was a word with ambiguous meaning. He now looked at it in a different light and realised it was a subjective word, which meant different things to different people, and to him now, the meaning contained elements of love and security, with the ability to live a life with family and hope for the future.



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A Door Closes; Another Opens.

(New Beginnings)



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The trauma support group met in the basement of St. Augustine's every Thursday at seven. Seated on folding chairs arranged in a circle, stale instant coffee in styrofoam cups, and the same faces week in, week out.

Marcus had been coming for six months. Long enough to know that Gillian always cried exactly twelve minutes after they were all seated, that Roger never actually shared anything real. Wendy sat and crocheted and made irrelevant comments, while the facilitator, Lidia, shuffled her collection of inspirational quotes on individual cards, enough of them to fill a skipbin.

"New beginnings," Linda said each night as the meeting began, her smile as worn as the carpet, "They are available to us every single day."

Marcus stared at his coffee. He'd heard it all before. *"One day at a time."* *"You are stronger than you think."* *"The first step is the hardest."* Platitudes that meant nothing when you went home to an empty apartment that still smelled like someone else's perfume.

But then Michael spoke.

Michael, who'd been virtually silent for eight weeks straight, who showed up and left with hardly a word uttered, suddenly said: "I burned it all yesterday."

The circle went quiet, all staring at him.

"The letters, the photos, the clothes, everything she left behind. Even the ring. I took that to the pawnbroker." His voice was steady. "Threw the ashes in the garden this morning. Maybe the tomatoes will benefit." He then paused and looked around at the astonished faces. "And do you know what? The sun still came up. I still had breakfast. The world didn't end."



Image by [Hans](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Marcus waited for the catch, the breakdown, the tears. They never came.

"That's wonderful progress," Linda said carefully.

"No," Michael said, standing up. "It's not progress. Progress means you're going somewhere. This is just... done. It's done; I'm done." He looked around the circle. "You're all good people. I hope you find what you need."

And he got up and walked out.

The group sat in uncomfortable silence. Roger cleared his throat. Gillian reached for a tissue preemptively. Linda shuffled her quote cards.

Marcus stood up.

"Where are you going?" Linda asked.

"I don't know," Marcus said honestly. "But I will know when I find the correct path."

He walked out into the warm October evening. Behind him, he could hear Linda starting her supposedly encouraging lesson, "Our strength is from within", the same one she did every week. But for the first time in six months, Marcus wasn't there to hear it all again.

He walked down the city street, towards the river. He wondered what hid behind all the faces he passed as he strolled on. When he reached the river, he turned towards the cafés and bars set back from the riverside promenade.

As he strolled past a particular café, someone called,

"Marcus, nǐ hǎo ma?"

He knew that voice, that greeting. Only one person he knew greeted him in Mandarin Chinese. He turned, and sure enough;



Image by [N-Y-C](#) from [Pixabay](#)

"Jing Wha, what are you doing back in Australia? I thought you were in Qingdao."

was until yesterday. Now I am back here, after five years. I will be working at the Brisbane branch. A new start, an new beginning, Marcus. None of the confusion and tensions of all those years ago. Come and have a coffee. You by yourself?"

"Permanently, Jing. It is a new beginning for me as well."

And their eyes met.

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The New Reality

(New Beginnings)

I had invited Phil and Marie for morning tea at our place.

The front gate's squeak announced their arrival and I parted the curtain, observing them as they strolled past the spiky bougainvillea, heads close. I imagined them whispering honeyed words, perhaps reliving a tender moment. My husband Michael stroked my hand before I opened the door. I hugged Phil and greeted her with a fleeting smile. I led them to the deck where the white cane table was set with a lace tablecloth and fine china. Michael brought out warm chocolate brownies and placed them beside the lemon meringue tart.

'You've gone to a lot of trouble.' Marie trilled.

'Not really.' I deadpanned. I squeezed in a snippet about mutual friends. 'Jenny is back from her European trip. Laura mentioned our Christmas catchup.' Phil nodded.

'Yeah, let us know the date, we'd like to see everyone.' They nestled together as Phil poured tea for Marie.



Jenny, Laura and I met for coffee.

'I must say I had a few tears.' I said.

'Why?' asked Jenny, always the pragmatic one.

'Aren't you happy for him?'

'I am, of course, but ...'

Laura added, 'Phil deserves to be happy.'

'I know, I know.' I replied.

'Let's organise a get-together soon.' Said Laura.

Image by [Didier](#) from [Pixabay](#)

We tried to include Marie but she had competing priorities, her son lived in Sydney and needed help, often at the last minute. She didn't get to our lunches. After what seemed like a long time we all finally met her. We shared a meal, hearing how they'd met online and learning about their recent trip to Vietnam.

'We have an announcement.' Phil said, beaming at Marie. 'We're getting married.'

I inhaled and forced a smile. 'Congratulations.'

Happy words flitted around the table, wishing them well. We waved them off as they had to leave early. The consensus was overwhelmingly positive.

'She's a great match for him.' said Jenny.

'It's wonderful they both love to travel.' Added Laura.

I stared ahead. I felt as if sand was sinking beneath me. ‘She has a gentle face.’ I muttered.

Jenny rolled her eyes. Laura patted my arm.

I discussed my reservations with Michael that night. He held my hands and spoke softly. ‘You know this is what Bianca would want.’

It wasn’t simple for me. Phil was previously married to Bianca, my best friend of 30 years and I struggled to accept that a new woman was now sharing his life.

Bianca’s luminous personality had charmed everyone in every room she entered. She embraced the weary child, listened to the waitress’ tale of heartbreak, admired the elderly diva’s designer caftan. When I was abruptly sacked from my part-time bar job for selling whiskey at the wrong price it was Bianca who met me at the bus stop in the rain. ‘You made a mistake, your future isn’t ruined. It will be ok, you’ll see.’ Her kind words quieted my racing heart.

Our friendship bloomed over bummed cigarettes in a residential college. We were a group of lonely young women far from family, navigating an unfamiliar environment. A peeping Tom had been haunting the gardens outside our bedrooms, causing fear and anxiety. One night Bianca spotted him and rushed outside yelling ‘Get out you pervert!’ He ran away and his naked presence didn’t disturb us again. Upon completion of our courses we returned to our birth cities and became engrossed in establishing careers and raising families. We remained in touch and tried to meet annually. Long, boozy lunches were peppered with conversations about partners, illness, children, finances. I still remember that Christmas when Michael and I were gutted as we’d lost a lot of money in a bad investment. I couldn’t afford to attend the reunion and Bianca’s tactful support eased my embarrassment.

That day Bianca called me is etched forever in my memory. Ten years into my career I was about to leave my office when she rang. ‘I can’t talk. I’ve been subpoenaed so I’m off to court.’ I was panicked and hurried to end the conversation.



‘We’ll talk later.’ She said.

I noticed her voice seemed a bit flat which was unusual. That night, after the kids were in bed, I rang her, my shoulders tense.

‘I’ve got some bad news.’

I put down my mug of tea slowly. ‘Bad news?’

‘I found a lump in my breast and it’s malignant. Aggressive.

Image by [Karolina Grabowska](#) from [Pixabay](#) I’m going to get treatment and I wanted to let you know.’

I leaned forward in my chair, mouth dry, as I wrangled to get the right words out. ‘I’m so sorry. What can I do? How can I help?’

Phil was by her side through chemotherapy, radiation and other nightmarish experiences during her twenty-year ordeal. We were grateful he was supporting her through those times. I spent periods with them over the years, leaving my family to help them. They had a son whom she adored. After months of chemo she had lost her hair. She was reclining in an armchair, scarf covering her head, nauseous and unable to eat the lunch I'd prepared.

'Why isn't Mummy eating her favourite sandwiches ?' Her son asked.

'Mummy's tummy is not feeling the best today.' I explained.

He scampered over and wrapped his little arms around her. 'You need a hug Mummy.'

Bianca and I had some of those hard conversations. 'It would be good if Phil found a partner. I know you would be there for him.' I nodded, mute.

I got that call from Phil four years ago. He told me Bianca was no longer with us. They say a long illness prepares you for the end but that's a lie. Nothing can prepare you for the ultimate loss, the over-arching sorrow of a loved one's death.

Her funeral was a full house, people sharing their stories about Bianca.

'My son was in the same grade as Bianca and Phil's son. When we lost him I felt like I couldn't breathe. Bianca, despite being sick herself, found time to visit me. She saw me cry and swear and smash things and never judged. She understood. And that got me through my grief.'

We all kept in touch with Phil and about eighteen months later he rang me. 'I've been to some good concerts lately.' He paused. 'You know I'm a big fan of Australian indie rock.' Another pause. 'Actually I went to one recently with a friend.' He coughed. 'I've got some news. I've got a new lady in my life.'

I was stunned. Quickly I regrouped. 'That's great Phil. I'm really happy for you.' And on one level I was. 'Bianca and I talked about it.' He said. Afterwards I closed my eyes. I was trying to register this tectonic shift. I was still grieving.

After the group lunch with Phil and Marie I had many silent conversations with myself. *This is the best thing that could have happened.* My jaw clenched. *They are both so lucky to have found each other.* I listened to my meditation tape. Twice. I missed her so much and sometimes Bianca joined the chat. *You and I discussed this. You know I would be relieved Phil had someone.* I remembered lively debates about differing views, her eyes flashing, passionate about her cause. *You promised me you'd be supportive!* I



picked up my phone and invited Phil and Marie for Christmas drinks at our place.

'I-I've brought rum balls.' Marie stammered.

'How thoughtful.' I replied. Michael took them to the deck. I watched Phil, his eyes on Marie, his face relaxed and content.

I joined them. 'Merry Christmas.' I said, my eyes crinkling in a smile.

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The Golden Belly-Button

(New Beginnings)

A long, long time ago, in the olden days when men were men and so were women, a beautiful baby was born. His parents were so proud and happy, but then they noticed that he had a shining golden belly-button. They were shocked and confused and so were the doctors, but the doctors always were, so that didn't matter. They gave him all sorts of tests and looked in his mouth and under his arm-pits. They were all there (his mouth and armpits) so they decided that everything was in working order and his parents were told to shut-up, that their baby was perfect and the golden belly-button didn't exist.

They did shut-up because they were too embarrassed to tell anyone, but the golden belly-button continued to exist. When the boy was old enough to look down, he saw his golden belly-button and marvelled at the wonderful sight. But his parents made such a fuss about it and wouldn't talk about it, he started to worry. This continued and, as he grew, he worried more and more about it and wouldn't let anyone see it. He wouldn't go swimming or sunbathing and showered with his pants on so the light-bulb couldn't see. It got so bad that he would only get changed in the dark so that he couldn't see himself and everyone wondered why he wore different coloured socks and his shirt inside out.

He wanted to get rid of his stupid belly-button and when he was old enough to leave home he went in search of someone who could help him. He went to a belly-button doctor who pondered the problem for a day or three and then rubbed methylated spirits on it to dissolve it. But that only dribbled down and dissolved his pubic hair and he had a naked willy for two months.



Image by [falco](#) from [Pixabay](#) Then he went to a Maori Kaumatua or old man in New Zealand, who said, "When I take out your golden screw, you never have to poo." He thought of the time he would save not having to go to the toilet and that would be great. So the Kaumatua talked to Papatuanuku the Earth Mother, Ranginui the Sky Father and Tangaroa the God of the Sea. Then he put down the phone and boiled up the gall-bladder of a Hapuka fish and the left eye of a Kereru bird. He rubbed the mixture on but the golden belly-button was still there and he had to go to the toilet really bad so that didn't work.

So he went to Australia to see an Aboriginal Kadaiche Man who said he would make him famous. “When I take out your golden screw, everyone gonna say ‘How do you do’”. He thought it would be good being famous with no golden belly-button. The Kadaiche Man lit a fire and stirred up spinifex sap with a waliru feather, played his diggeridoo and said some magic words – “Goo dubba mee awe kutu wanna” which meant “I don’ know what to do with dis stupid button, but I hope dis mixture make it go rotten.” But the golden belly-button just smiled back and said, “You silly old man, I’m not going nowhere,” and that didn’t work.

Then he went to America to see a Cherokee Indian Medicine Man whose name was Bent-Feather-From-The-One-Eyed-Eagle-With-The-Head-Ache-Coz-A-Fast-Running-Buffalo-Stood-On-Him and he had an extra long cheque-book so his signature would fit. He looked deeply into the golden belly-button, almost drowned and, when he had dried himself, he lit a fire and burned a cedar smudge and his finger and said “Ouch!” He asked for the eye-sight of the eagle, the strength of the bear and the speed of the cougar but they said, “Not today Man. Don’t you know it’s our day off.” So that didn’t work.

He went to many, many other lands and no one could help – the stupid belly-button just sat there smiling and shining. He came to Ireland where he met a Wicca, a wise woman, who said, “So you’re the twit with the golden belly-button.” And so he left that place.

He was very sad and upset and all he could think of was home and his stupid belly-button. He went back to New Zealand to see his parents but they still wouldn’t talk about it. He got very depressed and wanted to shoot himself but he pointed the gun the wrong way and shot three chooks and a tree. Feeling really sad he went wandering in the bush for two days and got lost. He eventually found himself but still didn’t know where he was and sat down on a log to cry. After a time he wiped his eyes and realised that a beautiful girl was sitting next to him.

“What is the matter?” she asked.

He told her of all his troubles and this took six days and he got hungry. When he had finished his story and his stomach stopped rumbling, she said she knew how to get rid of his golden belly-button. She told him that her remedy was unusual but if he believed her, it would work. She was so beautiful and looked so honest and caring he was prepared to believe.

“At the next full moon you must go down to the beach at sunset,” she said. “Strip off your clothes and lie on your back on the sand. Do not move till sunrise, and your golden belly-button will be gone.”

Then she vanished.

The next full moon he did as she said and lay naked on the beach and waited. He tried to sleep but couldn’t so the Sand-Man came down to sprinkle sleep in his eyes, missed and biffed it in his mouth and it took ten minutes to spit the stupid stuff out. Eventually, he did go to sleep and at midnight a beautiful golden fairy slid down a moon-beam and landed softly on his tummy. She got a golden screw-driver out of her Reebok shoe and unscrewed the golden belly-button. She put the golden belly-button and the golden screw-driver in the Nike bag between her wings and slid silently back up the moon-beam.

At sunrise he awoke and looked down to see that his golden belly-button had gone. He leapt up, full of joy, and his bum fell off.



Image by [Nathan Smith](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Melting Moments

(New Beginnings)

Jimmy poured his second cup of tea with one worried eye on the window, his kitchen table strategically placed so he could keep an eye on the lovely Mavis next door. The truth was he didn't really know her beyond a neighbourly, 'hello,' something he longed to change. Just the glimpse of her polishing the sink till it gleamed, buttering her toast in the morning, or reaching up to the hills hoist to hang up her not so smalls gave him the same comfort and warmth inside as letting one of his melting moments dissolve on his tongue.

He considered offering to do her lawns, or taking her bins out on a Tuesday evening, but she seemed so



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capable and independent she might take offence. Instead, Jimmy dillied and dallied like a foolish teenager and panicked he had left his opportunity too late. Today was the third day in a row he hadn't seen her. Anxiety bloomed making his chest tight. He wondered if he should drop in before picking up his daughter from the station.

Usually a man of meticulous habits, he left his dirty cup in the sink beside the cooling melting moments he'd baked for his monthly daughter's visit, removed his keys from their hook in the hallway and arranged his features to, 'here to help mode.'

He stood at Mavis cheerful yellow front door, finger hovering. The thought of her lying helpless or in-



Image by [Thomas Grau](#) from [Pixabay](#)

sensible inside urged him to be bold. He pressed the doorbell and heard its shrill summons echo through the house. He loosened his collar, paused for a full two minutes then pressed again for a little longer this time. Still not a sound from inside. What was the etiquette regarding a missing neighbour with whom one exchanged 'hellos?' Was it over-kill to contact the police or break down the door?

Jimmy faltered. He had half an hour to get to the station to pick up Sally who dropped by for a cuppa and to check in on him. She meant well, but Jimmy knew she was worried about him living on his own and not managing. Last time she had left a few pamphlets about retirement places close to where she lived. He had half a mind not to pick her up, then felt immediately guilty. Sally meant well but didn't understand how much he loved pottering around in his own place and doing whatever he pleased, whenever he wanted. Like making melting moments in the hope that Mavis loved them as much as he did.

Hand on his pattering heart, he stepped away leaving Mavis' door intact despite his foreboding. Once again, his efforts would be wasted on Sally who nibbled on one of his delicious biscuits and then left it there, worried about eating too much sugar.

The station was busy as ever and Jimmy's phone pinged for the third time, just as he drove into a vacant parking spot. At times like this, he wished he didn't have the phone. Sally had insisted. 'It's so you can call me if in an emergency or if you need something.'

The truth was, if it was an emergency, he would just let things sort themselves out. No point getting to a hospital only to be discharged a drooling, useless old fool.

He only had four minutes till the train arrived, so he hurried to the platform just in time to watch the preceding midday express whizz past. Jimmy took a deep breath and glanced at his messages. Sally worried if he was late. She lived in a world of what-ifs and worst-case scenarios.

Sorry Dad Called in to do shift at last minute did you get my texts just as Sally's train screeched to a halt and doors snapped open to disgorge passengers.

Jimmy elbowed his way through the hurrying throng, anxious to get home, worried he'd delayed his white knight routine too long. He tried to manoeuvre past a gathering crowd when he heard a loud and familiar voice. 'I am perfectly fine, thank you.'

He paused, one hand clutching his heart. There, sitting next to the contents of a ruptured case spilt across the platform was Mavis, rose print dress hitched up around her generously proportioned thighs.

Jimmy moved towards her one arm raised like Moses parting the Red Sea. 'Excuse me, please.'

The crowd stood aside in the face of his apparent authority, and he found himself by Mavis' side. 'Are you hurt?'

She wriggled her fingers, rotated first one and then the other ankle. 'I suspect I'll live.'

He gathered her belongings and with reverence, folded each of the beige knickers, substantial brasieres and nighties before adding the pill packets tied together with a rubber band and a pair of fluffy slippers.

'Have you lost anything?'

'Only my dignity.'

He hefted her upright, one hand under her elbow, his memory on pause at the brief glimpse of her nether regions. 'Could that perhaps be restored by sharing a cuppa and a melting moment.'

'The ones you bake while watching me polish my sink or hang up my washing?'

Jimmy's face heated up but the tightness in his chest loosened a little. 'Those very ones. I have a fresh batch cooling.'

'I thought you'd never ask.'

Without removing his hand from her elbow, he picked up her case and the two of them hobbled and walked the length of the platform as if they were an old married couple, Jimmy's heart bounding behind his rib cage like a puppy let off the leash.

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Second Time Lucky

(New Beginnings)



Photo by [Vitor Pinto](#) on [Unsplash](#)

I fiercely held back the tears threatening to ruin my carefully applied makeup.

This was supposed to be my perfect, magical, fairy-tale wedding day, but bad omens had plagued it from the start.

First, I'd freaked out when my fiancé surprised me with a morning coffee and my favourite almond croissant from Starbucks.

"Get out of here!" I'd yelled, snatching the bag from him. "Don't you know it's bad luck to see the bride?!"

Secondly, there was a hearse in front of the church as my limo approached. No girl wants to see someone go six feet under on her big day. I Googled frantically Yes, indeed — a funeral was an ill portent to a bride.

Thirdly, before I could exit the limo, my Maid of Honour rushed to the door, frantically signalling me to wind down the window.

"Now try and stay calm but the flowers for the church haven't arrived yet" she said. "Take a nice slow spin or two around the block. They'll be here in ten minutes."

My mouth fell open ... I couldn't believe it. The flowers had been so carefully chosen – each type of bloom, every colour nuance was steeped in meaning. Anemones for anticipation; chrysanthemums for fidelity, optimism, joy and a long life; baby's breath for an everlasting bond; and my favourite – iris - symbolising faith, trust, wisdom and hope. All in white and pale pink with splashes of purpley-blue and flecks of gold from the irises.



Image by [uyrii smut](#) from [Pixabay](#)

I couldn't envisage my wedding day without the flowers in which I was so emotionally invested.

What else could go wrong?

I didn't deserve bad luck. I deserved good luck. I had been so mindful of cultivating the best of fortune while avoiding any reason for Fate to be less than kind to me.

I'd been so careful to include 'something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue' in my wedding finery.

The lacy garter hugging my thigh had been worn by my mother on her wedding day – my 'something old'. My beautiful dress, 'married in white you will have chosen all right', so elegant and sophisticated, was also my 'something new'.

Something borrowed' had been easy – my Chief Bridesmaid had a collection of the most delicious (and expensive) perfumes and generously dabbed her Louis Vuitton 'Symphony' on my pulse points. The fresh notes of grapefruit, bergamot and ginger vibrated with joy and life, perfect for today. I tried to calm myself by putting nose to wrist and inhaling a huge breath of fragrance but all it did was make my head spin.

My darling man had gifted me 'something blue' - a stylish bracelet featuring my birthstone, aquamarine. Once, aquamarine was thought to calm the waters and keep sailors safe while out at sea. Now, they say it promotes clarity and releases negative energy..... I prayed it was in effect and tried not to worry. But of course, I did.

My headpiece featured a delicate veil as dictated by tradition to protect me from the curses of the jealous or wicked who would want to steal my happiness. Not a single pearl, not even a fake seed pearl had been permitted on the veil or anything at all bridal. For pearls look like water drops, or tears, and are linked to the idea of a bride weeping in her marriage. Another chance I just couldn't take.

I'd even hoped to find a spider on my satin and lace dress to denote prosperity, as per ancient English folklore... but none had obliged.

I wanted my relentlessly romantic, all-the-trimmings, perfect second wedding day to make up for the completely no-frills, no-budget, no-choice first one.

As the limo cruised slowly, I couldn't help thinking back...

It had been just as The Boss sang about in 'The River'. You know the song — it's the one where the young couple are married in a hurry by a judge in a courthouse and there are no wedding celebrations of any kind. The poor girl doesn't even get a proper wedding dress.

Oh yes ... you probably guessed. Just like Mary (either the one in the song or the Virgin Mary — your choice), I was pregnant. At sixteen. Registry Office nuptials and lunch at Sizzlers was all my mortified parents would spring for – they just wanted the situation 'fixed'.

Nothing turned out as it was supposed to. No white wedding, no picket fence, no happy family.

I lost the baby. The miscarriage both broke and freed my heart. The marriage started to disintegrate. I like to think we believed in the promises made and yet we proceeded to break every single damn vow we had uttered.

Five years in, I faced the fact that nothing was going to change unless I did. The thought of the rest of my life being just like the past few miserable years became more and more untenable. I had dreams to pursue and adventures to embark on, none of which was happening in that one-horse town.



Image by [Gustavo Braz Braz](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Societal conditioning and the expectations of others are strong bindings though. I flip-flopped backwards and forwards in a torment of emotions – I should stay, I should go, what will everybody think? I didn't want to hurt anyone.

Finally, one day I was done. I packed a few things in the V8 Commodore that was his pride and joy, left him a note, roared out the driveway, and never looked back.

That was over 20 years ago...

The halting of the limo pulled me back to the present.

The hearse was gone.

My trio of bridesmaids greeted me with excited smiles, clutching their cheerful posies, ready to proceed my entrance into the church. They looked so lovely in their lavender gowns and fancy hairdos.

Great swaths of blooms backed by crystal organza adorned the pews and a floral archway invited me to enter the sanctuary where my beloved patiently awaited my arrival. Friendly faces full of love lit up as I walked down the aisle.

Everything was even more beautiful, more perfect than I had imagined.

And none of those trappings mattered. Not really.

At last the penny dropped. Today I was marrying my best friend. Today was just a wedding, the marriage was the rest of our lives.

"I'm sorry," I whispered to my beloved.

"What for?" he whispered back.

"Overreacting this morning."

"Pfft...nerves. Let's do this," he smiled.

And we did.

Oh... and those bad omens. Not so bad.

My darling was just looking after me, like he always did and always would.



Image by [mr_halster](#) from [Pixabay](#)

There was no funeral that day and the hearse was borrowed to deliver my abundance of blooms after the florist's van broke down.

A spider did make an appearance, but not on my wedding dress. The marriage celebrant almost fainted when a lovely big Huntsman meandered across our marriage certificate as she signed it. That eight-legged ham nearly stole the show.

'Silly superstitions,' I muttered to myself, as I shed a few lucky tears of happiness.



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NEW BEGINNINGS - 10 FLASH FICTION STORIES

The New Boyfriend



Only after passing the Best Friend Test do I consider taking a potential boyfriend home to meet my family. It's the ultimate test — far more important than the How Many Kids Do You Want Test and the Do You Look Hot in My Lingerie Test.

Duncan is the first beau in ages to reach Meet the Family status. I've tried to continue dating men who fail the Family Test, but every relationship fizzled. I don't want to scare Duncan, but the truth is, no one has ever passed the Family Test. Not even come close, according to Dad.

I really like Duncan. I mean, I REALLY like Duncan. So I take a deep breath and invite Duncan to afternoon tea at my parent's place.

Mum puts on a beautiful spread — dainty fingerfood and tiny cupcakes all served on the best china. We perch nervously on the lumpy chintz sofa, surrounded by Dad's collection of stuffed exotic birds.

Dad selects a biscuit and politely asks Duncan "Do you mind if I dunk?"

"Of course not. Go ahead"

Mum and I try to keep a straight face as Dad dunks his Monte Carlo. In Duncan's cuppa. Duncan almost chokes on his cucumber sandwich, then grins and chuckles. We all join in. First test passed. A sense of humour is vital.

The small talk starts to feel more comfortable but I'm wary of being lulled into a false sense of security. I see Mum is worried too — her napkin is twisted into a tight coil.

Sure enough, Dad invites Duncan to 'come and have a bit of a chat ... on paper'.

Duncan raises his eyebrows at me as he is ushered into Dad's den. I just shrug and blow him a kiss — he's on his own for the Written Test.

Dad has compiled a list of 20 questions. Mixed amongst the predictable 'relationship with my daughter' questions are such gems as "Can you dance the Tango?", "Are you capable of looking after my piranhas while I'm on holidays?" and finally, "Do you enjoy watching pornography?"





Photo by [bruce mars](#) on [Unsplash](#)

After an anxious fifteen minutes, a huge bellow emanates from the den. I'm sick and dizzy with worry. I put Duncan in this position... and now I fear the worst.

The bellow turns into a roar. With relief, I realise it's laughter. I've NEVER heard Dad laugh so hard or so loud or for so long.

When they emerge, Dad is holding his stomach with one hand and wiping tears from his eyes with the other. He slaps Duncan on the back and says to me "This one's a keeper, Love!"

Duncan has a smile wider than the Clarence River. Everyone hugs and eventually, many hours later, Duncan and I leave.

At last I can ask the burning question "What on earth

was so funny?"

Duncan smiles and tells me "I answered all the questions with the same answer — No, but I'm willing to learn."



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By Any Other Name

(New Beginnings)

“*HER* name? Wait, Beth, you’re saying we are *NOT* having a boy? No Junior?”



“Nope Nick. Buckle up buttercup; girls are way harder to raise than boys. Just ask my parents. They’ll spill the tea. Oh don’t look at me like that. That’s what the kids are saying. In Shakespeare class this week I think I heard that one about a dozen times and one of the times I even used it myself. You know when Juliet is waiting for the Nurse to come back from her meeting with Romeo, and is fretting because Nurse is taking too long. I told the kids that Juliet is dying to have Nurse spill the tea. You should have seen their horrified faces. They’ll probably never say it again. Now if I could figure out a way to do in that ridiculous 6/7 thing they have going. Anyway, back to names, what about Rose? You know a Rose by any other name...”

“You want to name her Rose? Really you want to name our daughter after some Shakespearean flower? Seriously Beth, could you think of anything more girly? What if she wants to play football or go to school to become a plumber. Can you imagine hiring someone to fix your broken toilet with a name like Rose?”

“Hey! What’s wrong with a business card that says Tidy Toilets by Rose? Seriously, what if she wants to be a florist or...or... or an Alchemist!” I smile back.

“Hell Beth, an alchemist? What in God’s name is an alchemist and what does one of them do anyway?”

Not a fan of The Sorcerer’s Stone, I mutter. “An alchemist mixes magical elements to create even more magical results. I think being an alchemist would be positively the most enjoyable job in the universe.”

“Yep, that makes perfect sense. She can magically mix up her own 401K, health insurance, and mortgage payment someday. Really, Beth, we have to give her a name that sounds like success, something that will make her stand out in a crowd and, and... oh I don’t know, make sure she’s happy... I’m sorry honey, I know this should be fun, picking out her name and all, but this suddenly feels so real. I guess I’m scared. What if we aren’t enough?”

“Enough? Enough of what, Nick? We are going to love her with every fiber of our beings. She is going to



be the most loved little girl in the world, and I want her to have a beautiful name to go along with what a beautiful person she will become. I think Rose is a perfect choice or maybe Juliet?” I suggest hopefully. “I am a Shakespeare teacher after all. However, I’m open to suggestions. What are you thinking?”

“What about Samantha? Or Alexandra?”

“Absolutely not. I see what you are doing. Sam, Alex, nice masculine nicknames. Forget it. You’re going to be a Girl-Dad and I really like Juliet Rose. You can call her JR for short.

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SUBTRACT AND ADD

(New Beginnings)

It seems like a game of chess – of which I have scant knowledge. The old, big stomached European men in their high waisted trousers are always adding a piece to the board then subtracting a couple more until the stakes are high and someone calls “checkmate”. My Saturdays are often like that.



Image by [TMag](#) from [Pixabay](#)

I cruise the suburbs looking for *Garage Sale* and *Swap and Buy* signs taped onto light poles. As the day progresses, the signs shred, one strip at a time and I find it difficult to read the addresses, let alone the advertised *one wardrobe, kid's bike, everything goes* scrawl.

I toss the idea of 'which way?' into the air and see the adventure as 'value-added' -- like the commodities market hitting a month-long high I suppose – whenever I'm rewarded with a licorice allsorts collection of people and vehicles jammed in on either side of a street.

I don't look out of place as I lug a cardboard box up the driveway and take a short cut through the shrubbery. Everyone's carrying something, lifting or putting something down. Within one minute, someone has added my subtracted items to their new stash.

Near my patio, I have a herb and vegetable garden of every shade of green on the planet. I add countless seedlings to the soil, subtract the weak ones which inhibit thriving amounts of vitamins and I am rewarded with delicious value. It's strategy in its most creative form.

I suppose I could substitute 'chuck out' and 'bring home' for subtract and add but those common words don't seem to have any serious intention about them.

It's husband strategy I struggle with. My game here is like Monopoly. I add one gorgeous piece, find the fees are too high and don't pass go. I can forget about picking up the \$200. That's husband number one.

Husband number two. I add a six figure salary to my life and simultaneously subtract his physical presence.



Photo by [Olivia Anne Snyder](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Husband number three. He adds another wife into the equation. Only a subtraction gives value to me here.

Husbands four and five are more of the above.

Husband number six goes straight to jail next week. (He picked up a lot more than \$200).

But on Saturday – after the garage sales – I'll add another “I do” as I marry husband number seven.

The cork pops full of promise. I sip, fine Moët bubbles delighting my lips.

“To new beginnings,” I toast and flash my ruby and diamond ring in the sunlight.

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A New Gloria Soames

(New Beginnings)



Image by [StockSnap](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Arthur Soames' wife was as regular as clockwork: Monday – vacuum floors, clean toilet and roast pork for dinner. Tuesday – wash towels and sheets, her tapestry group and then steak and chips for dinner. Wednesday – wash clothes, clean kitchen and chicken Kiev for dinner. And so on.

He was happy with their routine ... until he realised computers were infecting his occupation and could take over his accounting job. He resisted these new-fangled gadgets for years, until his dwindling clientele meant his expenses were more than his income. He was embarrassed but

resisted telling Gloria, knowing what she was like when her mother died. He feared her reaction when he admitted his failure. He was about to give her his rehearsed speech when she met him in the hallway, wearing black heels, black slacks and a white business shirt with a coloured logo on the pocket.

His mouth hung open like a broken purse and she smiled as she'd never done before, like she'd just stolen the last cookie.

"Can we have a chat, Arthur?" she asked, waving towards the table she'd set with teapot, teacups and a platter of several biscuits. Definitely not the roast and Yorkshire pudding he was expecting.

He complied dumbly with a thousand thoughts whirling round on his brain: *Is this the I've-had-enough divorce talk? The I've-found-another-man talk? The I've-discovered-I'm-a-lesbian talk? The I've-been-diagnosed-with-cancer and have three months to live talk?*

"First thing, Arthur," she said as she sat and poured the tea, "is that this change is all good. For both of us. No bad surprises."

He nodded dumbly while his brain wondered how any change could be good.



Photo by [Vitaly Gariev](#) on [Unsplash](#)

"See, since my mother's funeral, I have been struggling ..."

"You have?"

"Yes, Arthur, and I didn't know how to tell you how sad I was and how paralysed I felt."

"I know that ..."

"Please, please let me finish."

"Oh, right." His brain had shut down, now that it was out of questions.

"Despite the paralysis, there was the urge to go on as it hit me that we only have one life. One chance. We don't get a rerun."

"Oh." *Is she considering suicide?*

"I also know you're stuck in a rut with your business and need space to step back and rethink."

"Oh, gosh." He didn't know he needed that.

"So, over the last six months I have been doing a real estate course."

"You didn't ask me," he said, plaintively.

"I knew you wouldn't agree so I used my meagre savings and, yesterday, qualified and, this evening, I have my first client."

"You're a real estate agent?" He tried to squeeze this new occupation into the small box he'd built for her in his mind. It didn't fit.

"Yes, naturally!" She smiled gloriously and she really did look beautiful.

"Why naturally?"

"What's my name, Arthur?"

"Uh, Gloria Soames."

"And that's what I'll be selling. Glorious homes."

They laughed together for the first time since the funeral.

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The Altercation

(New Beginnings)



Profanity spewed from his ugly twisted mouth. Perhaps it was the blue hair, the piercings hanging from his quarry's earlobes. Or perhaps it was the way his quarry's hair stood straight up, Mohawk style. Bec couldn't be sure. Not wanting to become involved, she turned away.

'Where do you think you're going? I haven't finished.'

She stopped mid stride, turning back, only to realise he wasn't looking at her. He wasn't speaking to her. Yet his voice commanded her attention. Looking about, she saw she wasn't the only passerby to stop. Staring was bad manners, she knew, but mesmerized by the

incongruity of these two combatants, she felt compelled to watch.

One a young punk. The other a suit. Who would win the battle? What was the battle about? She had missed the beginning... passing by as the profanities began.

'I'm leaving. I don't have to stay and be subjected to your foul mouth. I have a job to go to.'

'A job. What, ripping people off?'

'I owe you no explanation.'

'Why don't you lay off man? You're making a spectacle of yourself.' Someone from the crowd stepped forward.

Bec wanted to agree. She felt embarrassed for the young punk. But the foul mouthed one, would have nothing of it.

'Mind your own goddam business.' Looking around, he saw he had an audience.

'Look at him. Would you employ him? Would you let him in your house? Would you allow your daughter to go out with him? Would you be proud to have taken part in his birth?'

Bec realised there was more to this altercation than a suit hurling abuse at a punk.

The young punk's face crumpled, despair, shame, humiliation. Worse, was the grief Bec saw as he turned away.

'What do I tell your mother?' the suit called.

'Tell her I love her.' Bec watched as the young man straightened up, turned back to who she understood now, was his father, and said, 'Tell her I have a good job. I have a home. I have friends. She knows my number if she wants to contact me.'

The crowd shook their heads, disbelief or knowing, Bec wasn't sure, then began to disperse. The suit didn't move. His profanities seemed caught in his throat. Soon there was only Bec and the suit left.

'I'd be proud to call him my son,' she said, and continued her journey.

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The Arrival

(New Beginnings)



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It's an inauspicious start. All grunts and moans, the slapping of skin on skin. The first weeks are a blur to be honest. Whirling currents of change. And then an eerie stillness, followed by the moment that changes everything.

I'm not sure how far along she is before she works it out.

She rings him a couple of months later. 'You remember that date we went on?' she stutters into her phone.

Silence.

He agrees to come to the scan, stands all awkward, hands shoved in pockets. It still feels special. They put cold goop on her skin and push a probe into her belly. 'Look at that,' she cries out.

'A bloody baby,' he replies, his voice gruff but not displeased. 'Is it mine?'

'Who else's?' she responds, sounding properly upset.

I wonder whether she's doing the right thing to be honest, but she convinces him to make a go of things. Two car loads later, his computer and gaming console are set up on the kitchen table, his scruffy converse sit at the front door, dirty plates, and take away coffees clutter bare surfaces.

'I'm not here to clean up after you,' she complains, enlarging belly thrust forward.

'You insisted I move in,' he tosses back.

The atmosphere is tense, the two of them tiptoeing around each other, his plans for Europe shelved, her study indefinitely deferred.

I reconsider my opinion of him when he brings home a deluxe pram the size a small car. You need a manual to fold the thing and it doesn't fit into the boot of her Swift.

'Didn't you measure it before spending money we don't have?' she criticises.

He returns it and comes back with a collapsible second-hand model that any self-respecting parent would feel embarrassed to put their baby into.



Image by [Donna Hovey](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The evening it starts, she clatters around the kitchen, banging pots, chopping, slicing, then heating oil. The onions land with a sizzle, the rich scent of garlic filling the room. The smell sets things off.

Her belly tightens and she wets herself.

'It's started,' she pants.

He fumbles for the keys while she retches.

The car grunts to life, putters along and dies on the outskirts of the leafy, inner suburbs.

Her breath comes in short gasps.

I push hard.

She moans and gets out of the car, sits on the kerb.

I scramble to gain purchase, lose my grip.

He's frantic on the phone while fumbling off her undies.

My head's trapped in a vice.

She screams.

With a whoosh I land gasping in cold air, slimy and squished. I'm not looking my best, I'll be honest, and they are amateurs with no idea what to do.

She reaches down, forgets I'm still tethered.

They both stare at me while sunset bleeds into the horizon.

I want to reassure them, open my mouth and squall.

Their heads bump and they smile at me just as wailing sirens arrive.

Maybe I've picked winners after all.

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Character Assassination

(A New Beginning)

Tina sighed in exasperation. ‘This has to stop! I really have to do something about Mark. He’s gone too far this time. His arrogance is out of control.’

When he first appeared, he had seemed like an interesting character – a laid-back man with a quick wit. Friends laughed at his amusing comments and looked forward to hearing his opinions about all manner of things.

He became very popular in the community, but lately his relationship with those around him had undergone a worrying change. His comments were now more acerbic than funny, and he displayed a degree of impatience which upset some of the older people.

Emily Johnson was devastated when he described the lavender and calendula seedlings popping up in her cottage garden as weeds. She was thrilled when she saw the plants had self-seeded, and very indignant when Mark suggested the local children would happily pull all of them up for her.

He’d annoyed everyone in the caravan park. Everyone knew Stan was a bit of a loud-mouth know-it-all, but they had no idea Mark was far worse. The tales he was telling in the camp kitchen last night surpassed anything Stan had ever concocted.

He could have been kinder to Bob when he accidentally took a wrong turn and ended up on a narrow dirt road. There was no need to be sarcastic, because Bob did manage to turn the caravan around and return to the highway fairly quickly. Bob was a good bloke and didn’t deserve to be belittled in such a way.

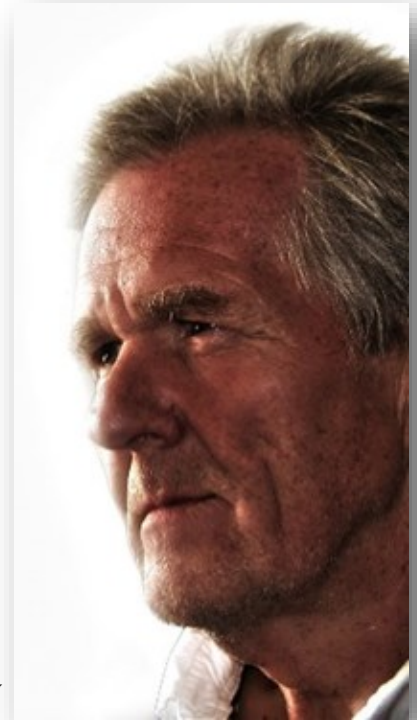


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‘I will have to do something about Mark,’ she repeated. ‘He has to go. It’s such a shame... I’ve had a lot of fun with him. What about the time he rescued those backpackers when they got bogged in the park? His imitation of the fruit pickers had everyone in stitches, but it wasn’t very kind.’



Image by [Joshua Woroniecki](#) from [Pixabay](#)

She hadn’t noticed the change in his attitude because it happened so gradually. When had it started? Had he been like that all along? Had she overlooked that side of his nature?

‘Mark has definitely provided some light relief over the years, but there’s no room for someone like him in this narrative. I wonder if he has any redeeming characteristics? I wonder... no, that won’t work. I’ll have to get rid of him.’

She shook her head sadly. It would not be easy parting with Mark, but it had to be done.

‘The story needs a whole new beginning,’ she decided, closing her laptop. ‘I’ll re-write it in the morning.’

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Christmas '74

(New Beginnings)

The saying 'running around like a headless chook' hit home the day before Christmas 1974.

'Careful. They're a bit skittish.'

The three children watched as Dad unloaded several crates from the green ute. The sounds coming from them were a dead giveaway. A turkey, a duck and three chooks.

'Come on. Help me get them into the backyard.'

Mum was standing at the top of the front steps with a tea towel in her hands and a wry smile.

'Take them through under the house,' she said. 'And don't forget to shut the gate.'

Joe, the youngest, picked up the crate with the single chicken while Meg took the duck. Toby took the last two hens and Dad tackled the turkey. The backyard was flat near the house then terraced up into the Belgian Gardens hillside. This was Townsville, capital of the north, and Christmas was never going to be a snowy affair.

Too right the air was wet but it wasn't ice crystals and cold, slushy rain. It was hot and humid, with snakes on the mate and huntsman spiders as big as bread-and-butter plates lurking in the brim of sun hats and under washing baskets. The children had only ever known hot Christmas lunches.

Two chooks straight out of the oven, with roast potatoes, pumpkin and carrots, and a large glass bowl of peas and beans with a blob of butter melting through them. Nanna and Auntie Bubba—Mum's mum and aunt—were the family matriarchs and Dad would drive to their Railway Estate home mid-morning on Christmas Day to collect them. Mum loved having them around as the temperature rose in the kitchen, their advice and help invaluable as lunch was being prepared. Not. This year, Dad's ambition was on show.

'I'll get live ones, love,' he said in late October. 'Make a feast of it.'

'You'll be doing the cooking,' she shot back. 'And the dispatching.'

The livestock arrived and the fattening began. December 24 couldn't come fast enough—for Dad, at least. The axe was sharpened on a whetstone lubricated with a drop of sewing machine oil from Mum's box of kit. The deed was to be done on the stump of an old eucalyptus tree on the terrace.

'Joe—hold her around her wings and lay her on the block.'

Thwack. The axe made a clean cut straight through the neck. Blood sprayed into Joe's face and he dropped the body, which took off across the terrace, a red mist where its head had been. It tumbled down the steps, creating carnage across the backyard. The children were screaming as Dad tried to calm them. Who knew a chicken had so much blood?

Eventually it slammed into the stone wall and keeled over. Mum surveyed the murder scene from the back verandah, stepped back into the kitchen and very quietly closed the back door.

'Fuck,' said Dad. 'Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.'

That was the year we celebrated Christmas with seafood.

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Best Laid Plans

(New Beginnings)

A plan is a guess about the future. It's been my mantra for years.

Some plans are just better guesses than others.

A romantic adventure to travel for a year took five years of planning. It would be a 'grown-up gap year,' earned through decades of hard work. The plan was to grow closer, sharing unknown countries and cultures, away from the daily grind and the monocultured life that shaped our priorities.

What could go wrong?

The year actually included two Christmases away. We wanted the first Christmas with friends and family in Scotland and the second Christmas in an exotic, Asian location.

Failing to work through the stress that packing up our lives took on our relationship was the first stumbled, hurdle. We landed in Edinburgh, barely speaking, but dug deep to face the marathon of festive events ahead. In a food-and-wine haze, we forgot to resolve the emotional baggage we'd packed, too. We had a great time celebrating a cold Christmas and headed off to Europe, blinded by our grand adventure, which so many people had jealously told us they wished they could either afford or do the hard yards to organise. We felt so smug.

Arriving in Europe with accommodation booked, but the intentional plan to have no set plans for what to do each day, became the next hurdle. Without the emotional stability of resolved resentments, choosing where limited funds would be spent dissolved into a blood sport.

'Alright for you; you've been up the Eiffel Tower when you were younger.'

'Why would you want to spend \$1000 on a trip to Jungfrau when there's no guarantee we'll even be able to see anything when we get to the top?'

'I'm having another beer and I won't be made to feel guilty.'

We limped along, waiting for moments of shared enjoyment, and sometimes those moments extended across days. The reality was that the spotlight we shone on ourselves by leaving busy lives filled with connection to others exposed a lack of connection between us. An unexpected outcome of a 20-year marriage.

My plan for the year involved content, smiling selfies, warm Mediterranean evenings with cold white wine, and spontaneous handholding to add physicality to the shared enjoyment.

His plan did not. His involved a whirlwind of monuments and famous sites, with photographs of such.

'Why do I need another photo of you? I see you every day.'

The breaking point came when I wanted to indulge in Christmas lunch at the Pullman Hotel in Bangkok. 'Exotic Asian' for me included luxury—I'd never shared that part of my plan.

So, we broke.



Image by [Laurentiu](#) from [Pixabay](#) I sat on the deck of the Pullman, overlooking the river, enjoying champagne and prawns. The peace of the solitude turned out to be a destination I'd been waiting to arrive at for a long time. My pace became my normal. I spent time gazing, pondering, reflecting... no set plans.

We guessed our future; just not the one we were both now to live.

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THE WEB OF DREAMS

(New Beginnings)

The impertinence of those men is a lament blazing from my twisted mouth. I am crossing the river, and on the other side, dew is hanging delicately on the grass. I am alone. The rain slaps my face. I endure, shimmying around the sharp rocks hidden in the long yellow grass. Then, a fizz of excitement, is there a shack I see in the distance? Will I be saved?

Semi awake, full of painkillers, my dream abruptly ends, and my sweating body turns. Oh this flare of pain in the back and the hips, I take more medication and return to sleep.

It is as if life had stopped happening to them. The three sisters keep on walking, sliding their feet into unknown future of this bare, windy desert. The wall of the past must be crushed. The abuse of their husbands is but one huge messiness of their life they have to leave behind. How can men cause such pain to their wives?

My body shivers in sleep.

Was it Edgar Allan Poe who wrote *-The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague.*

The villagers will be looking for them. People will think they had no fear, to dare to enter the desert, these three sisters who disappeared during the night. The truth is, they were intimately aware of the fear, living it, but learnt to leave it behind, to start again. Death was not a choice, life of abuse was worse than death. The choice was running away in the pursuit of a key to freedom. Life is a movement. They are flexible, fluid, they are alive.

Again, I wake up: delusions or dreams? Drug induced shadows in my mind. Prescription drugs side effects making horror movies. Dark side of the moon calling my name.

My mind is like the sky, layers of clouds hide its true nature. The spiderwebs of dreams throbbing in my head. It is better to get up.

There is a certain restlessness, bubbling away as I finally get out of my bed. I must ensure my mind is my friend. Happiness is the result of my inner maturity. I say goodbye to the web of dreams and welcome a new day. With patient dedication, I can keep my new beginning fresh day after day, till I leave this world. Saying YES to dreams and delusions, acceptance is a one-way road to self-discovery. Just like my Stapelia on the balcony, I open up to my new day.



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NEW BEGINNINGS - 8 POEMS

Budgie to Falcon

(New Beginnings)

The lone budgie, its feathers falling
Friendless and sweet, a voice no more does sing
It looks down for there is its heart
In the detritus of the insolent cage

Then a sound, a thought ... something
A reasonless moment, an invisible hand
Lifts the weakening bird's beak
Eyes skyward, a fleeting moment

And, suddenly, there's a gap, wires not straight
An instant thought, an instant wing-beat
He's free, released from the cage
But terrified of spaces, afraid of crowds

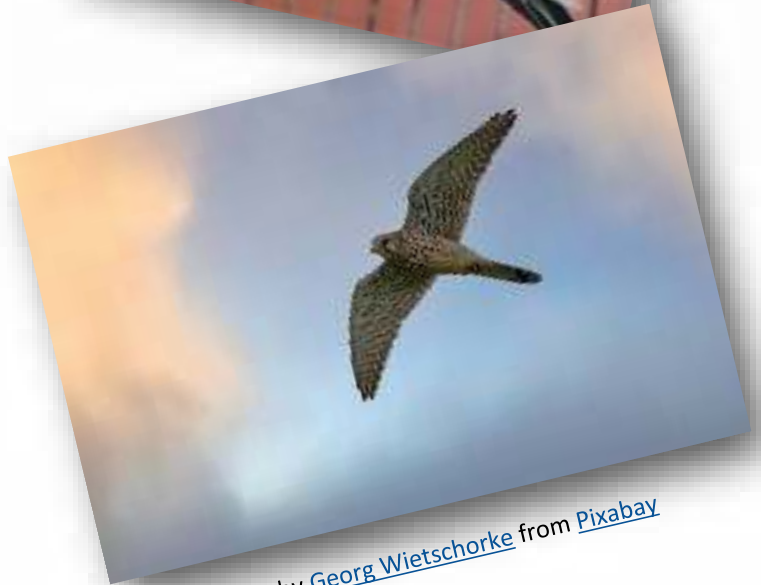
To the skies, to the blue, limitless skies
As he looks back, his feathers have grown
His chest expanded, an accordion bird
Singing louder and louder as he grows

And then swoops to the moonlit lake
Another bird, a huge falcon approaches
No, not another, for the other is him
Swooping, shining and smiling

Image by [Georg Wietschorke](#) from [Pixabay](#)



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“NO MORE”

Brave souls-
Take the heat-
Know no defeat.

New Beginnings-
In this world-
Of greed, corruption, destruction.

Earth rent asunder-
Plunder.
Species extinction-
Limbs blown off-
From emancipated bodies.
Greed, destruction, starvation.

New Beginnings-
Brave souls take the heat-
Know no defeat.
Stand and say-
“No more
Your day has come-
Greed, corruption, destruction-
New Beginnings”.



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CALLIOPE DAWN

(New Beginnings)

beneath a stary sky
and the cross that shines for us

Calliope River
shimmers in the moonlight
sweet scent of wattle
mingles with wood smoke

a frogmouth in the ironbark
waits, motionless and alert
gentle breezes
stirs the embers of our fire
a possum creeps along a branch
seeking a daytime hideout

a moment of stillness
on the quiet riverbank
till a glow on the horizon
signals a new beginning
- joyous birdsong fills the air,
welcomes a new day



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Tattoo

(New Beginnings)

How did she get here? She's a smart girl.
He lovebombed and fooled her, swept her up in a whirl.
Left many a mark in red, blue and black
But worst is his name, tattooed on her back.
Abuse, obsession, coercion, control, possession,
You wouldn't believe the strength it took to leave.

Many things have healed as truth is revealed
And no longer does she blame herself or feel shame,
Yet that ink is a niggling reminder of a time she wants left behind her,
And she desires it gone, not just make-up concealed.
The laser clinic says it's too deep, there are too many layers
So she seeks a second opinion to refute the doomsayers.

A burly man, tattoo-covered as are most in his trade
Examines her carefully and says "I'm afraid
The Clinic is right but I have an idea."
He takes her hand and asks "Will you trust me, and not fear?"
He lays her down on her tummy and tells her "Relax"
As with needles, gun and colours he works on her back.

At last he lets her see why her tattoo took so many hours –
Gone is the name, replaced with "RESPECT" entwined with flowers.

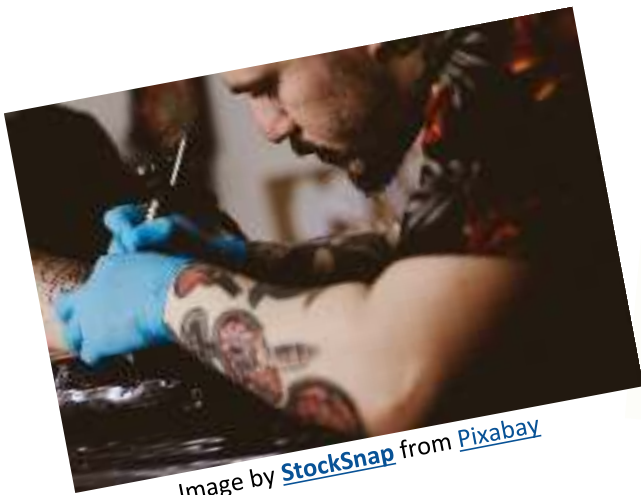


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New Rain

After the jingles had jangled
and laughter had spilt into the kitchen
where the heat of the
oven seared my face and
sweat dripped into the gravy,

I smiled to see the
family together for Christmas,
and hoped the summer rains
would cleanse the past
for the new year to come.

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Immersion

(New Beginnings)

Increments of light
leak pink and gold,
a quiet symphony of colour
announcing dawn.

A soft breeze shudders,
leaves whisper,
a blue tongue slithers.

Scents of rain
damp earth,
moist leaves,
café brews
mingle in my nostrils.

I leave wet prints
on hard pavement,
perspiration like dew,
glistens on my skin.

I taste the promise of warmth on my tongue.
farewell the dissolving night.
immerse myself in the untainted freshness
of the new day.



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From Impermanence to New Beginnings

Under the dust and concrete,
a large part of nations are buried.
The survivors endure: unwanted, impermanent.
Thousands of displayed souls advance
with determination,
filled with ripples of hope-
for the massacres to end.
Their prayer: *May the world CARE.*
But this time,
the prolonged cruelty destroyed too much.
Sliding their feet into a safe tomorrow
will only happen when our world stands united
and
lifts them off the dirt and the ashes
that once were their homes.



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In the Morning.

(New Beginnings)

“Good morning!” I say to the dawn every day,
as I welcome the sun in my own humble way.
While watching the sunrise dispersing the night
I give thanks to the Lord for the wonderful sight.

When the clouds take on colours they act as a link
from the darkness to daylight in hues red and pink.

The sun as a disc grows from ruby to gold,
then it brightens to silver and drives out the cold.

The truth is, the sun is not rising at all—
it’s the earth that’s rotating; a gigantic ball.

Just one of a system of orbiting spheres,
which have circled the sun many millions of years.

All born from primordial dust mixed with gas,
and assisted by gravity pulling their mass,
they turned into planets, inanimate all,
until God added life with a miracle call.



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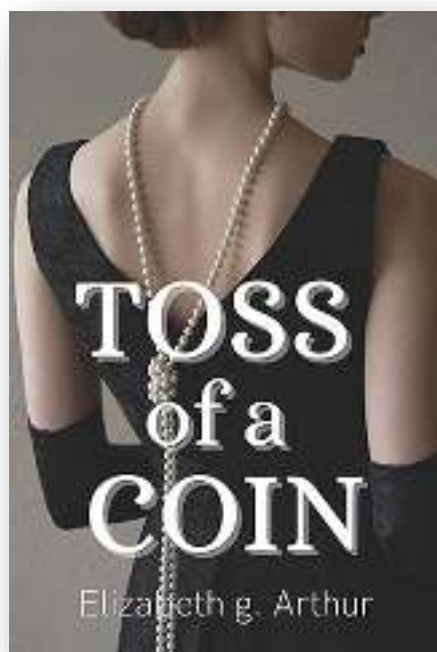
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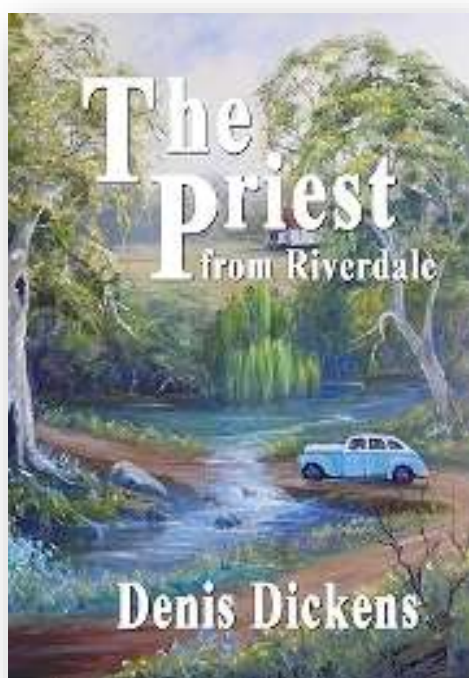
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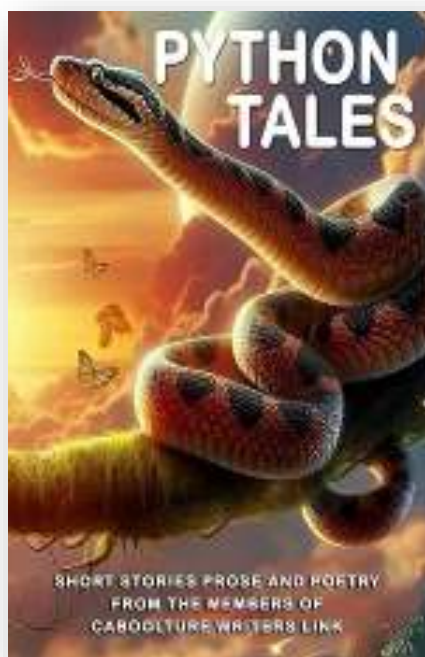
Women's Fiction



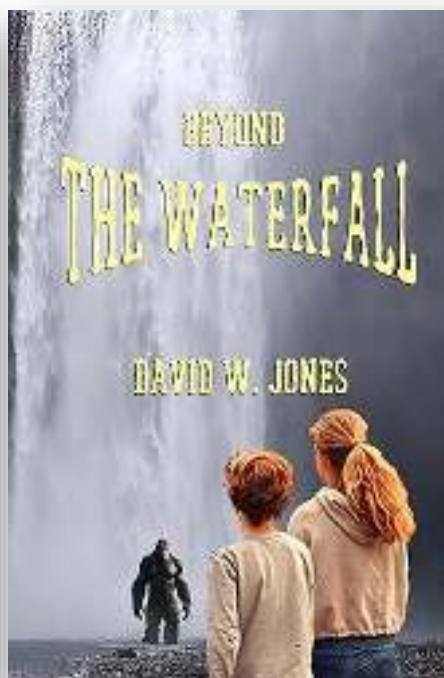
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