

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

This edition of SCOPE magazine is volume 72 No. 2

SCOPE

April / May Edition

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Event.

Award Winning Author

Troy Henderson

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Still some summer left
For reading at the beach.

FAWQ

Fellowship of Australian Writers
Queensland

Supporting emerging writers since 1921

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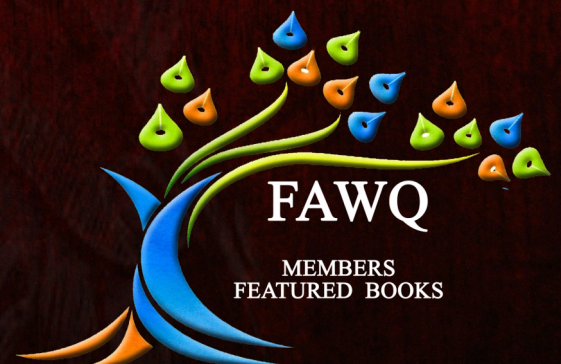
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FAWQ

Fellowship of Australian Writers
Queensland

Supporting emerging writers since 1921

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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.

[Click Here for Submission Guidelines](#)

JOIN WITH US AT FAWQ

AND HAVE YOUR WORK PUBLISHED

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PROMOTE YOUR BOOKS.

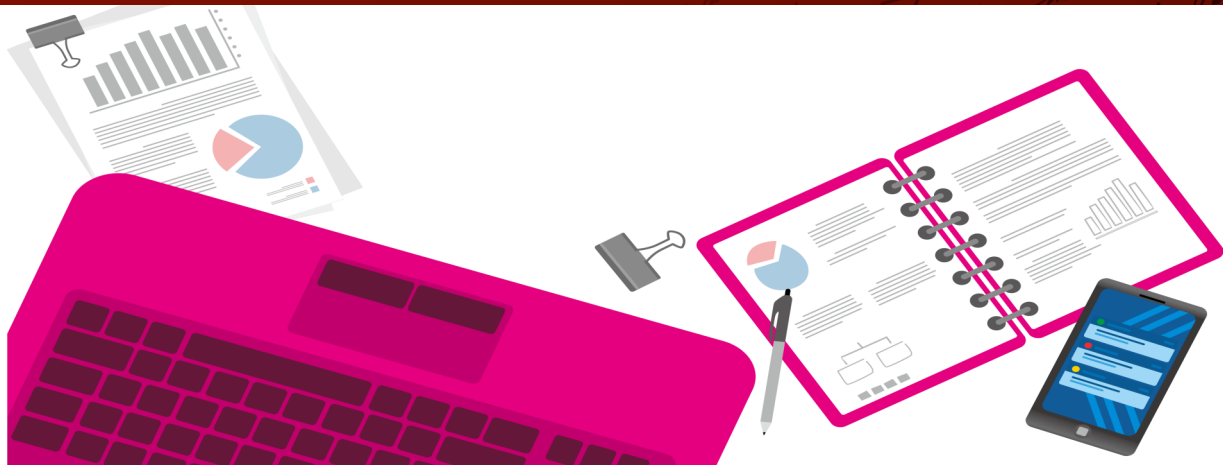
MEMBERS:

Submit your books for promotion in the ['Member Featured Books'](#) area on the final page of this publication.

Simply email your request to editor@fawq.com.au

with your book title and purchase link (and a cover image if you can).

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From the President's Desk.

President's Report for Scope Magazine

Welcome to this edition of Scope Magazine. Many thanks to those who attended our recent AGM earlier in March. The current Management Committee (Executive) was reappointed. It's a good Committee. It was also encouraging to hear from the members present that this was a good gathering and there was a common purpose evident.

It is interesting that many contemporary commentators have noted the polarization of discourse in our modern society. The internet often hasn't helped with this. One of the things I like about the FAWQ is that within this community there's a wide range of opinions, and yet there is also a wide respect for differing opinions.

Recently I was speaking with a member of a sister FAW group (interstate), and she opined that writing, both fiction and nonfiction, can be an effective way of exploring ideas, and thus a way of moving away from the I-am-correct and you-are-wrong feel, which is so prevalent with polarization. Writing can be a way of establishing dialogue.

Many thanks to those who attended the recent author event with historian Jane Smith. Our next author event features award-winning author Troy Henderson, at 2pm, Saturday June 6, Redcliffe Library. All are welcome to attend. Please also don't hesitate to make contact if you'd like to discuss anything related to writing generally or anything raised in Scope Magazine.

(Dr) Jim Page,

President FAWQ.

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

Members Achievements.

Congratulations to the indefatigable Mocco Wollert on your achievements over the last two months.

Achievements – Milestones –February 2026

Your Time Magazine:

Column – Police February 2026

Senior Digest USA

Column – Give up the car February 2026

Poem – Night Rain February 2026

Scope

Poem – The secret February/March 2026

Poem – The loneliest place on earth February/March 2026

Poem – The plan February/March 2026

Haikus – 4: red balloon, black stones, scent of lemon,
water dragon February/March 2026

Achievements – Milestones –March 2026

Your Time Magazine:

Column – Shrinkage March 2026

Senior Digest USA

Column – Bucket List March 2026

Poem – What Footsteps can do March 2026

Quadrant

Poem – Discombobulated March 2026



image by [Prawnny](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Members Achievements.

Congratulations SUSAN SKOWRONSKI - Member Credits August 2025 -Jan 2026 (Continued)

Free Xpression Magazine December 2025 Issue

Article: Reach Out

Poem: Going Home

Free Xpression Magazine January 26 Issue

Article: International Day for Clean Energy

Poem: Brisbane Valley Sunrise

Namalata Magazine Winter 25

Poem: Drover's Dawn

Namalata Spring 25

Article: My Garden in Spring

Poem: Woodlands in Spring

Namalata Summer 25

Article: Reach Out

Poem: Christmas Bell

Congratulations to MOCCO WOLLERT for her December writing Achievements

Achievements – Milestones –December 2025

Your Time Magazine:

Column – Away from home Christmas December 2025

Senior Digest USA

Column – Anxiety December 2025

Poem – Celebration December 2025

Longreach Leader

150 Words Christmas Story December 2025

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FAWQ Special Event—Featuring Troy Henderson

Troy was the winner of last year's Australian Fiction Prize with his book 'River City'. His topic will be 'Before and After the Prize: A Writer's Journey'

Venue – Redcliffe Library at 2.00pm on Saturday 6th June – followed by lucky door prizes, afternoon tea and networking.

Members:\$10 Non-members:\$15 - [BOOK HERE](#)



Troy Henderson is a fiction writer from Brisbane, Australia, where he has lived his whole life aside from a two-year stint in London.

He has a Bachelor of Popular Music and a Masters in Journalism.

Troy's twenties and early thirties were spent playing in bands and immersed in music, and he turned to novel writing seriously in his mid-thirties.

His first book, *Head Grenade*, was shortlisted in the Hawkeye Publishing Manuscript Development Prize and the Queensland Writers Centre's Adaptable and Publishable Programs, respectively.

Head Grenade was published through Hawkeye Publishing in October 2023.

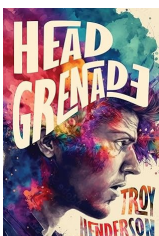
His short stories have longlisted in the Australian Writers' Centre Furious Fiction competition, and placed in the GenreCon Short Story competition, and FLEUR Flash Fiction Contest. In 2024, he was commissioned to contribute to the

anthology *Is This Working?* and also appeared at the 2024 Brisbane Writers Festival.

The manuscript for his second novel, *River City*, won The Australian Fiction Prize in 2025, and is due to be published through HarperCollins Australia in early 2027.

He's working on his next novels, right now.

Click the cover to learn more of Troy's first novel -



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APPLICATIONS FOR THE

2027 Creative Time Residential Fellowships

ARE NOW OPEN

Published authors or illustrators of at least one book for children or young people are invited to apply for “the gift of time”.

The May Gibbs Children’s Literature Trust provides accommodation, local support, and travel to the host city Adelaide.

Visit www.maygibbs.org.au for more information under ‘[Creative Time Fellowships](#)’

For application details contact Samantha Rubenhold - Fellowships Coordinator
contact@maygibbs.org.au

Completed applications must be received by 5.00pm on [Sunday](#) 31st May 2026

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Welcome to Brisbane's New Haiku Group

By Duncan Richardson



Brisbane's new haiku group, 'Water Dragons', had its first meeting on Saturday morning, at Brisbane Square Library, with four people attending, discussing haiku and tanka and contributing work for feedback.

Our gathering included three members from the former 'Paperwasp' group, which folded at least eight years ago, so some reminiscing was bound to occur but despite that, we covered a lot of new ground and are ready for April 18th, when we hope to welcome a new member or two.

Our *haijin* bring a variety of experience, and newcomers to haiku are welcome. We'll start at 10.30am, finish around 1pm and interested people can contact me, on duncrich@outlook.com.

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The Centre for Men and Families

Presents.

Men Like Me Poetry Competition



The Centre for Men and Families recently reached out to FAWQ to help promote awareness of their Men Like Me Poetry Competition.

They invite you to join them in exploring the profound narratives of men's lives through poetry, where vulnerability meets strength and personal growth is celebrated.

The Competition is dedicated to showcasing the diverse experiences of men. This initiative seeks to provide a platform for poets to express themes of introspection, resilience, and spiritual evolution. By en-

couraging open dialogue through poetry, they aim to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the male experience in today's world.

PRIZES

The first-place winner will receive \$300, the second-place winner will be awarded \$150, and the third-place winner will earn \$100.

All poems receiving Honourable Mentions will be featured in a published collection, ensuring that every voice is heard and celebrated.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

To participate in the Men Like Me Poetry Competition, please submit your original poem via email to admin@cfma.org.au.

Entries are open to both men and women.

Entries close on Sunday, 10 May 2026

Ensure your submission is in a Word document, with the poem's title clearly stated at the top.

Do not include your name or any identifying information within the document.

Each poem should not exceed 40 lines.

An entry fee of \$20 is required, which grants you access to an online copy of the collection featuring all poems, including those receiving Honourable Mentions.

If submitting multiple poems, please include them all in a single email.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information such as important dates, the judging process and poem ownership and rights, go to centreformenaustralia.org.au/men-like-me-cfmf-poetry-competition-2/

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Hybrid Publishers - Heros or Villains? Do your Due Diligence!

Hybrid publishing sits in a grey zone between traditional publishing and self-publishing. That alone should put you on alert. Some hybrid publishers are legitimate, offering real editorial, design, distribution, and marketing support in exchange for shared costs and shared revenue. Others are just dressed-up vanity presses that will happily take your money and deliver very little. If you don't do proper due diligence, you won't just lose money, you'll waste time, rights, and momentum on a book that deserved better.

The first thing to understand is this: a legitimate hybrid publisher behaves like a business partner, not a service vendor. If they accept every manuscript that comes through the door, that's a red flag. Real publishers, even hybrid ones, are selective because their reputation depends on the quality of what they release. If there's no vetting process, no editorial assessment, and no rejection rate, you're not dealing with a publisher. You're dealing with a printing service wearing a blazer.

Follow the money next. Hybrid publishing means shared financial investment, but the structure must be transparent. You should know exactly what you're paying for and what the publisher is contributing. If they're charging you thousands upfront but can't clearly justify where that money goes, that's not partnership, that's extraction. A credible hybrid publisher will break down costs for editing, cover design, formatting, distribution, and marketing. They will also show you how they earn their share, usually through a percentage of book sales, not just upfront fees.

Now look at royalties and rights. This is where a lot of authors get burned. You should retain meaningful rights to your work, especially copyright. If the contract locks your book into long-term control with the publisher, or if reclaiming rights is vague or difficult, walk away. The royalty split should reflect the shared investment. If you're paying most of the costs but receiving a small percentage of sales, the deal is upside down. That's not hybrid publishing. That's you funding someone else's business.

Reputation matters, but don't be lazy about it. A polished website and a few glowing testimonials mean nothing on their own. Dig deeper. Look for independent reviews, author forums, and actual sales performance of books they've published. Are their titles available in major retailers like Amazon or bookstores? Do their books look professionally produced, or do they scream amateur? If you can't find evidence that their authors are succeeding, assume they aren't.

Talk to authors who have worked with them. Not the hand-picked success stories the publisher puts on display. Find real people. Ask blunt questions. Did the publisher deliver what was promised? Were deadlines met? Was communication consistent? Did the marketing support actually move books, or was it just generic social media posts and empty advice? You'll learn more from one honest author than from a hundred marketing claims.

Scrutinize their distribution claims. Many hybrid publishers promise "global distribution," which often just means your book will be listed online through standard print-on-demand channels. That's not the same as bookstore placement or active sales representation. If they claim bookstore access, ask for specifics. Which distributors? What relationships? What percentage of their titles actually make it onto shelves? If they can't answer clearly, they're selling a fantasy.

Marketing is another area where weak publishers hide behind vague language. "We'll promote your book" is meaningless. What exactly will they do? Press releases? Paid ads? Email campaigns? Media outreach? And more importantly, what results have they achieved for other authors? If their plan relies heavily on you doing the bulk of the marketing, then you need to question what you're paying them for.

Finally, read the contract like your future depends on it, because it does. If you don't understand something, get legal advice. Watch for non-compete clauses, rights grabs, vague deliverables, and termination conditions. A strong hybrid publisher will not pressure you to sign quickly. Urgency is often a tactic used to stop you from thinking clearly.

Hybrid publishing can work, but only if the publisher brings real value to the table. Your job is to cut through the marketing noise and verify everything. If something feels off, it probably is. There are good operators in this space, but they are outnumbered by companies that survive on author optimism and poor scrutiny. Be the person who does the work upfront, so you don't become another cautionary story later.

There is another option, the one I prefer. Publishing companies who will sell you only what you need.

You may have skills of your own that can cut your costs for you. You may be an editor, a cover designer, a formatter and can perform these tasks yourself. There are companies out there who will advise you and sell you only what you need. One such company is ['Brisbane Self Publishing Services'](#) there are companies like this who can cut through the confusion and costs.



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HIGH JINKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (1985)

A short story by Phyllis Morton.



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

Only one more day of Residential School. Then all of us, nobody under the age of forty, will be returning home. For the past three days, I've avoided offers of nocturnal frivolity. Not that anyone offers me any. Nocturnal high jinks are part of university residential school life. People wandering back to their rooms very late at night, making sounds, that made me wish they weren't what I knew they were. Not that I feel envious. I attend university to learn, not play around like less inhibited enrollees. Anyway, I'm looking forward to our lecturer's farewell party tonight.



Image by [Alison Updyke](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The dark-haired man who sits opposite the lecturer at tutorials looks shy. I'll start a conversation with him. Surprise, surprise – he's a Catholic priest! Not that well informed, though. He doesn't know Karl Marx's Dad was a Rabbi. Our course this semester is Russian history. So, I would have thought some familiarity with the founders of Marxism would be compulsory for Catholic clergy.

History study isn't usually a man's thing – unless it involves digging up bones and a television contract. With tonight's gender

imbalance it'll be interesting, seeing if anyone walks away with a male escort. A few women are single Mums, so probably one of them might get lucky. Then, there's the friendly group of five who come from Canberra, probably working for a degree and career promotion.

The most intriguing guest is the African chap who came with Jenny, our lecturer. Polite, well-dressed – obviously an academic colleague. He's someone I'd love to paint, with his shiny, black skin and studious spectacles. I'll leave him in her capable hands. Another possibility for a chat is the short fellow with a ginger moustache and polished, brown shoes. He's been working the room like a man with a mission, pouring drinks like it's a medical emergency. Strange he says nothing at our tutorials.

I'll circulate and take a few snaps with my Instamatic. Ships in the night we may be, but university life is supposed to be more than only reading textbooks. I'll have to drink a wee bit more than usual and laugh a bit louder. I'm not displaying metres of cleavage, though, like some are. Ankles are my sexy bits. They can swing to the beat of the music. I'll regard tonight as an assignment in high jinks.

Wow! The skinny blonde's wasting no time. She's parked herself on the African's lap. She's practically licking him. He's too well-mannered to tell her to shove off. That's something for the album. The Canberrans are getting very merry and want to party all night by the look of things. Ginger-man, in his shiny shoes, is zipping around like the alpha male fish in an aquarium. He's certainly pouring enough liquid to fill one. The priest is being gracious handing round the food. Sensible way to dodge spills, and any suggestive small talk.



Image by [Ira Lee Nesbitt](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Communism, capitalism, Russian gulags and Rasputin are being argued with more raucous humour than facts. The elephants in the room are The Cold War and the threat of nuclear war. It is a party, after all, not a political forum. I'd better jiggle like the others to that rock music. I'll look silly. It's mandatory, so the party isn't a flop.

Jenny and her African male guest are showing signs of leaving. However, the women are revved up and decide to reconvene the party somewhere else.

"Yep, sure I'll join you." Ginger-man is all for it too. He's inviting us to his room on the third floor of E block. The others nod with smiles. He picks up a half full bottle, I offer to carry another and we set out together. I call out, "See you up there." They give us a convivial wave. I wave back, feeling happy and slightly woozy. I wonder what Ginger-man's name is.



He's a gentleman, taking me by the elbow, as we climb three flights of stairs. The corridor on the top floor is silent. I giggle, remarking, "It's so quiet. Are they geography students on your floor – worn out by field excursions?" He opens his door, I enter and he moves to shut it. "No, leave it open – so the others know where to come," I say.

"They'll knock", he replies, shutting the door and immediately backing me against it. His moustache rasps across my face as he smacks my lips with a vigorous kiss. I feel no frisson of passion. Surprise is my reaction. Intuition alerts me his motive is not driven by desire. More like work – a job, like putting out the wheelie bin or cleaning the car. He looks me in the eye. "You're faithful to your husband!" He releases me, excited by his discovery.

It dawns on me the others have no intention of joining us. I'm not going to give him the thrill of an adulterous conquest. I've got to stall for time while I can think and remain vertical. "Not yet," I say with a suggestion of surrender in my voice.

Image by [Phillip Gorbachev](#) from [Pixabay](#)

I sidle away from the door and glance at the bed against the wall. He's replaced the college bedspread with the Australian flag. Posters are blue-tacked to the walls – Lenin, Karl Marx, Castro. I lean close to a framed document, "Oh is that Bertrand Russell's letter to his wife, Edith – the love of his life?" Well, I think it is, because I've left my glasses in my room and all those drinks have numbed my optic nerves. "How attractive!" I wave at the posters. He responds to the praise with a smirk.



Inside my skull, wheels are turning like a good Swiss watch. This is a trap. His shoes indicate ex-military and the flag on the bed screams ASIO. He's been quiet in tutorials because he's a phoney. As if any of us undergraduates in Russian history are working for the KGB?

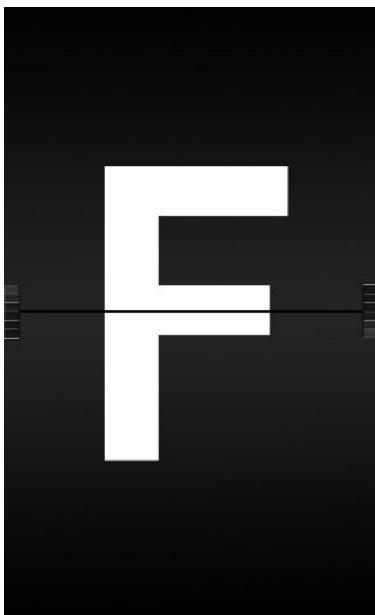
"Any chance of a coffee?" I sit on his bed and look up with a smile. Must get him doing things, while I work out how to make a dignified exit. Will I challenge him? No – see what his next move is.

“Do you take milk with it, sweetheart?” He has a confident look, so he hasn’t twigged I’m on to him. The electric jug and mugs have been set out perfectly. Even serviettes – exactly according to his ASIO manual, probably.

“Absolutely.” I giggle and imitate a coy squirm to show appreciation for his term of endearment. Spilling hot coffee over his pants might work. Suddenly, he’s all military briskness. “I’ll only be a minute. I have some in the fridge down one level. Watch the kettle and switch it off before it starts to scream.” I feel I should salute.

He goes, leaving me alone. Wow, how easy was that! I count thirty seconds. I ignore the kettle. I hope it boils over his copy of “Das Kapital” before he gets back. I open the door and cross the corridor to the wall of glass that overlooks the enclosed quadrangle. I watch him emerge into the corridor on the lower level and enter a small kitchen. Before he gets the chance to look up and see me, I head for the opposite staircase. I take off my shoes, so he won’t hear the clatter. I intend to reach my room on the ground floor as swiftly as I can. Dam! He probably knows my room number. But he won’t know where I’ve parked my car. I’ll sit in the carpark and listen to Schumann’s “Trout” piano CD – calming, uplifting music. I’ll laugh too, relieved I’m one little fish that got away.

Next morning, we almost collide at the Refectory door. I should apologise for leaving his kettle to boil over and wet his copy of “Das Capital”. However, we both look the other way. We tacitly agree to apply the policy of dignified amnesia to avert embarrassment.



I take my bowl of cereal and sit with the Canberra girls. “Where did you get to last night? You let me down.” There’s scepticism in their look. “Would you like to see the photos I took?” When I pass them the photo of the skinny blonde mauling the African, they don’t look quite so condescending. The priest walks past, giving me a very frosty look. So much for the credo, “Judge not others dot, dot, dot.” Another bit he missed in his theological training, I tell myself.

Next semester I’m sticking to textbooks. Hopefully getting some credits. Although for my assignment, Higher Education ‘High Jinks’, I deserve the big ‘F’.

Image by [Michael Schwarzenberger](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The end

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The Great Bathurst Debate

A short Story by Peter Carseldine
(An exercise in writing in dialog only)

"G'day mate. 'Ow yar goin'?"

"Yeah, good mate. 'Avin' a beer?"

"A beer? A beer? Why would you stop at one?"

"Good point, Baz. Go a pot?"

"Sounds the go, Mate, 'its 'ot enough out there. Cheers, Davo."

"No worries. So, you watching Bathurst this year?"



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

"Is the Pope Catholic? Course I am. Wouldn't miss it for quids."

"Reckon Brock'll take it out again?"

"Brock? Peter Perfect himself? Mate, he's got it in the bag. That Commodore's a weapon. Nine wins, Davo. Nine bloody wins. The King of the Mountain."

"Yeah, well, even kings fall off mountains, don't they? I reckon Dick Johnson's got a real crack at it this year. That Falcon's flying."

"Johnson? You having a laugh? Holden's owned that mountain since God first made mountains."

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"Owned it? What about Moffat? What about Bond? Both Ford men, both Bathurst winners."

"Ancient history, mate. We're talking about now. Brock and that beautiful Marlborough Commodore. Poetry in motion."

"Beautiful? Looks like a bloody packet of cigarettes on wheels. The Falcon's got lines, style. Aerodynamics."

"Aerodynamics, he says! Listen to Professor Einstein over here. Mate, that Commodore, it's about grunt-power! The roar of that Holden V8! It makes your chest vibrate."

"Your chest vibrates because you're having a bloody heart attack because it's looking like Brock isn't going to make the finish. Ford's got precision engineering. German influence, you know."

"German? Oh, come off the grass! Here we go. Might as well be driving a bloody Volkswagen if it's got anything German about it. Holden's Australian through and through. Built here, raced here, won here."

"Ford's been Australian longer than you've had that mullet of yours. Besides, doesn't matter where it's built. Matters who crosses the line first."

"Another beer, my shout"

"Too right. Make mine a seven this time. This discussion could bo for a bit."

"Two beers it is. Oi, Kev, two beers of Gold when you get to it mate, thanks!"



Image by [Mircea Iancu](#) from [Pixabay](#)

"So where were we? Oh yeah, you were talking rubbish about Ford."

"Rubbish? That's a bit rich coming from a Holden bloke. You lot are still dining out on Brock like he's the second coming."

"Because he is, mate! The man's a legend. A hero. An artist behind the wheel."

"An artist? He's a lucky bastard who's had the best cars and the best team. Put him in a Falcon and see how he goes. Thanks, Kev, yer, my shout, yer, take it out of that"

"Put him in a Falcon? That's like asking Bradman to bat with a bloody ping-pong bat. Why would you handicap a genius?"

"Handicap? The Falcon's the superior machine! Better handling, better top speed, better looking."

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“Okay. you two, turn the volume down a bit. The rest of the customers don’t want to know about Bathurst, and the Boss is getting cranky.”

“Sorry, Kev, yer, okay. And you was sayin’ better lookin’? Better lookin’? Mate, ever had your eyes checked? The Commodore’s a work of art. Sleek, muscular, purposeful.”

"It's a cigarette box, like I said earlier. A big red box with wheels with Marlborough written over it. My Great Aunt Maud’s got more curves than a Commodore."

"Your Great Aunt Maud's got more curves than Conrod Straight! Don't bring looks into this when you're backing a car that looks like someone sat on it."

"Someone sat on it? That's your professional opinion, is it? What are you, a bloody automotive designer now?"

"Don't need to be a designer to spot a ugly car when I see one. That Falcon front end looks like a startled catfish."



Photo by [Martin David](#) on [Unsplash](#)

"Catfish? *catfish*? The Commodore's looks like a dropped pie! All squashed and sad looking."

"You're talking absolute crap now, mate. Total crap. The Commodore is iconic. Iconic, I tell yar!"

"So's the Titanic. Doesn't mean I want to be on it when it goes down."

"Oh, that's bloody hilarious. You should be on TV. Get your own comedy show. 'Davo the Delusional Ford Fan.' "

"Better than being a Holden tragedy. You blokes are like a cult. Probably got a shrine to Brock in your lounge room."

"And you've probably got a poster of Dick Johnson on the back of your dunny door! Bit weird, mate!"

"At least I'm backing a winner! Ford's gonna dominate this year. Mark my words!"

"The only thing Ford dominates is the DNF list! Did Not Finish! That's the Ford motto!"

"Oh, piss off! At least our engines don't blow up every second lap!"

"Blow up? *Blow up*? The Holden V8 is bulletproof! Built like a tank!"

"Drives like one too! Slow, heavy, outdated!"

"You take that back!"

"Make me!"

"I bloody will!"

"Yeah? You and whose army?"

"Don't need an army to deal with a Ford fanboy!"

"Fanboy? fanboy? I'll show you fanboy, you Holden-humping, Brock-worshipping—"

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"Right, that's *ENOUGH!*"

"Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Bruce, the publican, and you've both had enough. Too much beer, too much mouth, not enough sense."

"But he started it!"

"I don't care who started it. I'm finishing it. Both of you, out. Now."

"You can't kick us out!"

"Watch me. Johnno! *Johnno!*"

"Yeah, boss?"

"Escort these two gentlemen to the street, would you?"

"My pleasure, Boss. Right, you two. Come on, up you get."

"This is un-Australian!"

"What's un-Australian is arguing about cars like a couple of dim-witted kids. It's just Bathurst, for crying out loud."

"Just Bathurst? *Just Bathurst?* Did you hear that, Davo? *Just Bathurst!*"

"Bloody disgusting. The man's got no soul."

"Finally, something we agree on."

"Yeah. An' the Publican's is a soul, bloody arseole."

"Total moron."

"Probably drives a Toyota."

"Ha! Probably does. Come on, mate. There's another pub down the street."

"Good idea. We can watch the race there."

"Long as you don't waffle on about Ford all day."

"Long as you admit Holden's a glorified shopping trolley."

"There they go again, Johnno, you better walk us all the way down the street."

"No worries, Boss. Okay, gents. Just keep it civil, eh?"

"Civil. Right. Sure..... Let's go Davo. Probably welcome customers at the Commercial. So anyway, about that qualifying time..."

"Yer, there was something fishy about that."

"Well, like I said, looks like a startled catfish."

"You're like a bloody dog with a bone; never let it go....."

And so they continued, all the way to the Commercial Hotel.



Photo by [Duskfall Crew](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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Leaving Mars

A short Story By Barry O'Farrell



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Alert!

“We have a small problem,” the voice of the Flight Commander over the cabin speakers. It was only five hours after lifting off from Mars base, “one of the provisions modules was loaded empty. Meals will have to be rationed. Sorry.” *I thought empty catering carts only happened in Economy Class on commercial aircraft*, thought Brad Garrick, Researcher, Technician and Astronaut.

#

My day begun differently. I had emerged into the weak light of a Martian morning. Quiet, still, frigid. Two Earth years of living underground in Martian lava tubes to avoid radiation was at an end. *Now I know how the troglodytes felt*, I thought.



My thoughts were broken when an alarm sounded in my helmet. The radiation sensor on the suit had triggered. It probably would during the walk to the vehicle. I switched it to Mute and climbed aboard to begin the long voyage home. Next stop planet Earth...home, hearth, wife.

#

228 uneventful Earth days in transit. Funny thing, the 228 days homeward voyage seemed to pass more quickly than the 228 outbound despite rationed food. I filled the time formalising my notes. The main pleasure was seeing Earth loom a little larger in the window every second or third day. The Moon too looked like an old friend from boyhood. It was studying the Apollo Program which led me to this career choice.

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#

Alert!

Darkness. All lights out. 30 minutes later the cabin lights came back on. “Strange glitch,” voice of the Flight Commander over the cabin speakers said, “the old ‘switch everything off, then switch ’em back on again’ worked. All systems good again.” *This in a billion dollar, state of the art spacecraft...good grief. Back to daily routines.*

#

Alert!

“Space junk.” announced the Flight Commander, “Kessler Syndrome is becoming realer. Yep, the zone gets more cluttered with junk every round trip. As a matter of prudence, I shall veer course to avoid a collision. I also want to check if there are any other small pieces in its damn wake. Shouldn’t delay our arrival much.” *Nearly home. No more delays please.*

#

Alert!

“A last minute delay,” began the Flight Commander, “bad weather over the preferred landing sites This will mean a further 48 hours in orbit. Thank you for your patience people.” *What’s another 48 hours sitting around on short rations more or less? Annoying is what. I want to go home.*

#

The trade-off being Mission Control was able to provide little news transmissions. Capsules of current affairs highlights and sports highlights over the past couple of years. Coronavirus still the major concern. It keeps evolving and won’t disappear.

My extended family had gotten off light. Among its victims a distant cousin I didn’t really know. Probably last met him in childhood. The rest of the family were safe. My wife was safe; my parents were well and probably wondering when we would make them grandparents.

#

Safely back on Earth, quarantine/rehab/debriefing took another 23 days. In rehab, everything felt heavy, even books. Welcome full-size meals. Welcome wide variety of drinks. Welcoming phone conversations with my precious wife. It was a rush to hear the warm tones, seductive tones, of her soft, even weak, voice. A flush came over me. Tingling sensations. Never had small talk been so wonderful and arousing.

At final debriefing I took the opportunity to state I made my contribution and don't want another deployment on the red planet, thank you very much. I walked outside and enjoyed the friendly sights, sounds and breezes of planet Earth. The Sun warming my skin so different from the risk of radiation poisoning on Mars. Would be happy to stand in the rain too. The simple pleasure of the subtle changes heralding a new season. It's the small things taken for granted. This is what I missed.

On the Taxi ride (this cab with a real human driver; how rare!) to my home, my imagination ran to a seafood dinner in an expensive restaurant. *Probably a platter. Take our own sweet time over it.* I began to salivate at the thought.



Image by [昕沈](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Crunch! Jolt! The sound of metal-on-metal scraping. Taxi sideswiped.

Taxi driver asked me to stay seated whilst they exchanged details and checked the damage. *After the millions of kilometres I have voyaged, a car crash. Really? What time will I get home? Will I ever get home? What else could happen?*

“Still drivable,” stated the Taxi driver back in his seat if a little shaken. “I’ll take you to your destination. Then I go to body shop. Talk with insurance too. I got insurance too.” The remainder of the drive home quiet, uneventful.

#

Debriefing included this advice. ‘Your significant other may have changed her hair colour and/or hair style. She may have even gained a pound or four. SHUT UP! If you feel you should say something, SHUT UP! Shut up and enjoy your welcome home.’ The words echoed in my mind as I walked up the path of my house, keys in hand.

I unlocked the front door and called to my wife “Honey I’m home.” *It is so cheesy. Any innocent listener would think I work a regular 9 to 5 job.*

“In the kitchen,” she called back.



I was hoping she would say bedroom but okay, the kitchen could be fun. I braced myself for her change in hair colour. I walked into the kitchen. She seated; blouse wide open...breastfeeding a newborn baby.

She looked up at me wide eyed, “We have to talk.”

A terrible sinking feeling almost overwhelmed me. Fighting back welling tears, I shook my head. Slow, deep breath. “Talk...yes, we have to talk.”

“Not in front of my baby.”

I looked away momentarily, “Baby...no, not in front of your baby...your baby...right.”

END

Word count: 963

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Publisher: The Genre Society (USA)

Publication date: October 2025

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LITTLE FEET DANCING ON THE MOON

A short Story by Danijela Hlis



One day, in late December, the Tasmanian Devil got so tired of her facial cancers and so annoyed with the earth pollution that she went to live on the Moon. With the modern technology, it was easy. She, (her name was Devil Isa),



Got a ride from the friendly pelican John.

Devil Isa was thrilled to discover that there were lots of animals already on the moon. It was as if they had created their own Retirement Heaven. The main rule was "Live and Let Live." The moon was an intriguing but safe place.



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The beauty of their brains was often discussed, as they all knew that those humans below had no idea of animal's feelings, intuitions, or thinking capacity, or, in fact, the memory puzzle.



One day they all had a meeting about HOW to improve the quality of their last moments of life, so as not to waste any time on silly things like anger and jealousy or even wars. Wombat Mary and kangaroo Tim pointed out: **“There is no time like the present to begin to live your life.**



On the moon, their little and big feet danced a lot, and the clouds dropped tears of joy and the skies sent them rainbows of love. The sea stars too joined them in the dance.

They lived as if there were no tomorrows.

A few months later, while on a picnic, Devil Isa, who was now healthy and strong, said to her friend Emu Rosemary:

“The trouble is that one thinks *there is plenty of time ahead!* Wrong!

People down on the Earth have this LIFE PLAN:

Play and kick for a little moment, when you are a baby, like our sisters possums do!

Then compete and learn in school, then compete and perform at work, buy all on credit, rush all the time, and by the time you may stop with all this and start playing and kicking again, you are too old and half dead!

I know I don't OWN time, so I laugh and love and dance all the time.”



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The wise Emu replied:

“You are so right. I have learnt this from a friend on Earth:

“We are all slaves of our own actions. So I ensure that all my actions are good and positive, and considerate to others. Can you imagine how much we could teach the people on Earth?”

Just then, a strange looking Pelican John flew in and sat with them. The feathers were dirty and the feet were covered in mud.



“Where on earth have you been?” they asked, and the kookaburra gave him a reassuring hug.

The Pelican, tired and confused, replied:

“I can’t remember, but I think I may have gone back to Earth”.

“But why? Are you not happy

here with us?”

“I have been getting very confused lately, I may have dementia; it’s a worry”. Pelican John looked a bit scared so the wise Emu

and the beautiful healthy Devil Isa accompanied him back to the large pond in the middle of the moon.



“Look dear, here you are safe, and among your friends. Remain in the simplicity of the present moment and you will not get lost again. We love you, you are not alone”.

Just then, three small frogs hopped out of the water, jumped on emus’ back and started to sing:



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“Look up and not down, look out and not in, look forward and not back and lend a hand whenever you can”. They showed the Pelican how to wash again, and together they played and danced on the moon.



Just then, three small frogs hopped out of the water, jumped on emus' back and started to sing:

“Look up and not down, look out and not in, look forward and not back and lend a hand whenever you can”. They showed the Pelican how to wash again, and together they played and danced on the moon.



Boobook Ned flew in and a warm smile lit up his gorgeous black eyes:

“My dear friends”, he said, “...**forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair...**” a wise man once said.

“We are all so blessed, to be able to come and go, between the Earth and the Moon. If God wanted us to perish in the place of our birth, we would have been born with roots deep in the soil. So let us rejoice in our Freedom.”

The final moral of this fable is....”**We are not born in chains, we can fly! If unhappy, go and let your little feet dance in a new place. Our life is filled with choices.** “



Danijela Hlis March 2026

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Poetry by Yo-Merry Todd-Birch



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“MY HEART”

Careful-
My heart beats.
Listen-
Put your ear-
To my chest.
The beat is clear-
Strong-
Tender-
Handle with care.
Careful-
Hold my heart-
Gently-
Lest it should break.
Give my heart-
Your best.
Softly-softly-
Hear the beat.
My life-
My best-
My heart-
Has no rest-
It IS my LIFE.

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“CHEESECAKE”

Excuse me-
I'm about to drool.
My eyes pirouette-
Dance around-
A luscious-
Inviting-
Decadent-
Cheesecake.
Clothed in cream-
Lazing-----
In a pool-----
Of strawberry dream.

Excuse me-
Most gracious-
You have been-
But of cheesecake-
I must partake.
I'll sit at the table-
Eat a slice-
Or two???
Oh! you're ready!
I'll stand up-
Excuse me-
I'm not able!!!

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Poetry by Yo-Merry Todd-Birch

“SEARCH”

Stop-
Search for the truth.
It lies-



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Within a flower-
Leaf of a tree-
A butterfly.

Stop-
Search for the truth.
It lies-
In the song-
Of a bird-
Songs of the sea.

Stop-
Search for the truth.
It lies-
Within a tiny ant-
The humming-
Of a bee.

Stop-
Search for the truth.
It lies-
Within the stars-
A sunset-
Rainy day shower.

Stop-
Search for the truth.
It lies-
Within us.

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“GREEN LIGHT”

Tide comes in-
Tide goes out.

Sun rises-
Sun sets.

Moon rises-
Moon sets.

Days come-
Days go.

Friends come-
Friends go.

Storms come-
Storms go.

Red light—stop-
Green light—go.

Breathe in-
Breathe out.

What a spectacular day!!!



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Poetry by Mocco Wollert

A Sonnet

Bottlebrush

A bottlebrush grows near my house,
nourished by heat, and summer rain.
I watch as the seasons turn each year,
wait for it to start blooming again.

When the tree is gradually dressed in red,
glowing rich in the midday sun,
a table that is set for hungry birds,
I know spring has finally begun.

Each flower is a vivid, red brush,
shining in the morning light,
amongst the leaves they dazzle, they blush
emerging from a gentle night.

Each day I see this work of art
it brings great joy into my heart.



Image from Canva

Still Life

red square
empty wine glass
crumbled tissue
eye drops
discarded shoes
tattered tv programme
remote control askew

face deep in shadows
hands idle
glasses abandoned
chipped cup
leaking pen
empty page waiting



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Poetry by Mocco Wollert

Stream

thought run through my head
thoughts I do not want to think
my head fills with dark memories
a stream flowing as black as ink.
Somewhere I know there shines a sun
I know of hope of happiness
of loving arms and childish fun
if I let go of bitterness.



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Sleep

‘When I lay me down to sleep, angels guard my
dreams.’
Well, maybe once upon a time, when children
believed in angels, fairytales and happy end-
ings.
There is no happy ending now, only terror.
The guardian angels have been killed, destroyed
by drones
that now fill the night sky, looking for victims.
Children might see them as a different kind of
angel,
know they will not spread snow-white feathers
to protect them but only unfold black plumages
of death.
Desperate mothers might still wish for the old-
time angels
to come back, bring peaceful sleep, guard the
children’s dreams,
protect them from harm ‘when they lay down to
sleep’.
But nothing will protect them from flying
death,
stalking them, filling their nights with their high
-pitched buzz,
programmed not to guard but to ‘seek and de-
stroy’.

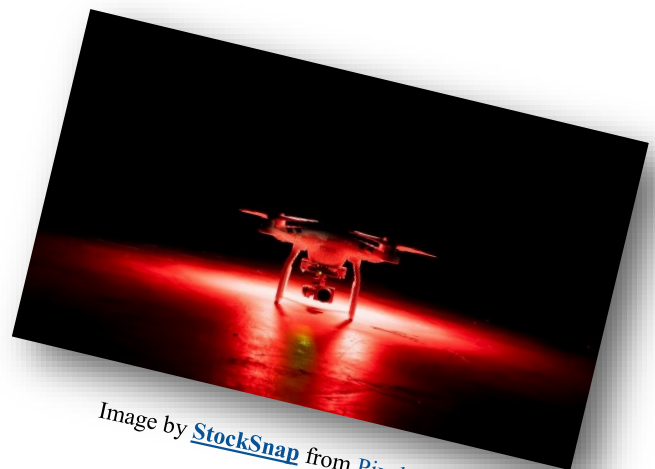


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APoem by Mocco Wollert

Spirit of the Day

The dawn spirit has lain in wait,
cold as a corpse, a frosty silence,
just behind the last darkness of the night.

It sneaks around the fading moon,
chills sliding over a world exhaling vapour breaths.

With the first light, morning spirit,
an impatient fellow, rushes in on the wings of bird
song.

Chattering like a chimp about to jump
through a canopy of green, it chases
the first rays of the sun, the life force.

Midday spirit spirals through the air,
a burning twister, rising towards
a fierce disk of fire, spreading
flaming fingers over a panting world,
a scorched landscape lying supine.

Soporific slowness holds back the spirit
of afternoon. Drowsiness has sapped it
of all energy. Looking for shadows, it hardly
moves.

Like a soft-toned cello it harmonises
with the mellow rustle of leaves at their ease.

Evening brings the spirit of contentment,
spreading its murmuring flow indefinitely.

The air is still warm, moves languidly,

remembering day, letting it go,
ready to settle in the spreading twilight.

The night spirit comes like a ghost,
muscles in with darkness deepening,
invading with stealth, whispering soundlessly,
wrapping the world into its shroud
of lost colours, ghost noises.



Image by [Antonios Ntoumas](#) from [Pixabay](#)

A Windmill Lament

Poetry by Phyllis Morton

Metallic arias arch over paddocks dried
Lamenting existence to boundless sky and soil
A lone windmill extols with aching pride
Past abundance earned through constant toil.

Rusted vanes still cleave each gust
Lifetime bondage to contrary winds
Downdrafts pirouette with time-worn dust
Service – purpose – now left long behind.

Iron tower abandoned for progress' sake
Unclaimed, unlinked - gaunt outcast now
Formless scrap metal they'll probably make
Recycled to trite usefulness somehow.

An ominous forecast of mankind's lot?
Endangered victims awaiting stark futures?
Windmills of God-given intellect left to rot?
A I contest Grey Matter Glory – which endures?



left to rot?

intellect left to rot?

A I versus Grey Matter Glory – which endures?

Or Ominous forecast of mankind's lot

Endangered victims awaiting dubious future

Their windmills of intellect left recklessly to rot

Between A I mastery or velvet subtlety of Nature?

Which will endure?

Bestowed not by A I but bounteous Nature

Soon helpless victims chucked out to rot

rot?

Grey Matter Glory has built our culture

A I versus Grey Matter Glory

glory

landscape relic outcast now

Iron tower abandoned for progress' sake

Cranking – clanking – harsh outcast now

Scrap metal is what they'll make

Recycled into usefulness somehow.

Ominous forecast of humanity's lot

Endangered victims with dubious future

Windmills of proud intellect being left to rot

Heartless A I versus GREY MATTER GLORY.

WHICH WILL ENDURE?.....THE END

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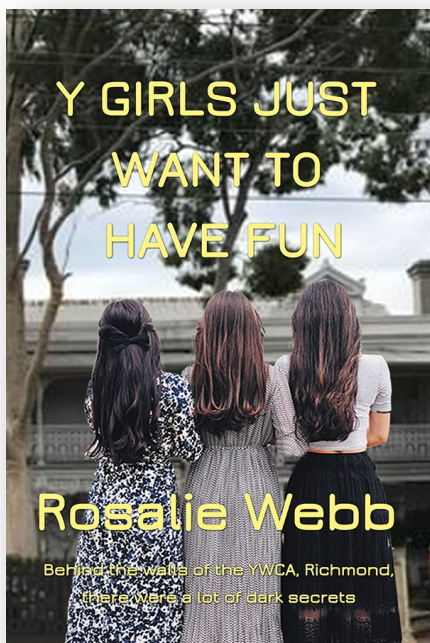
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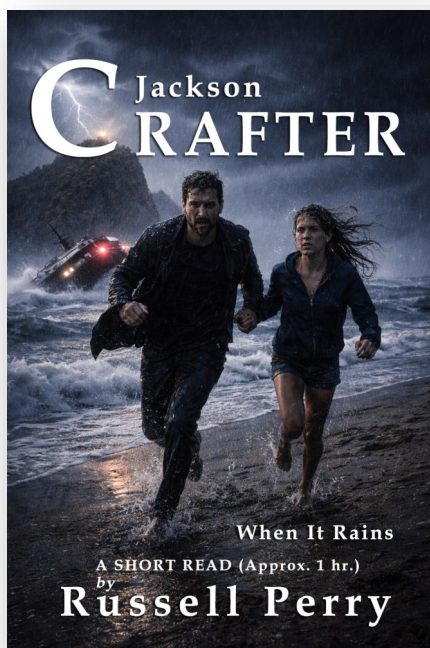
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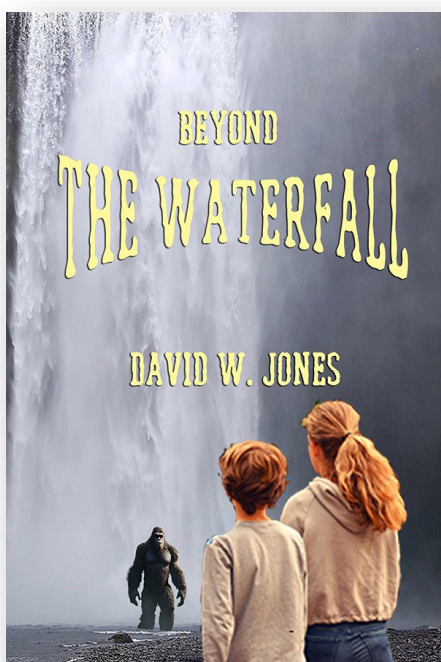
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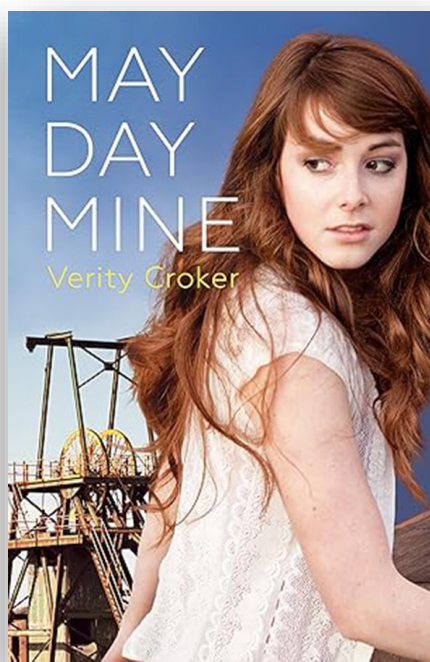
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Young Adult Fiction



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