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Tomorrow, the sun

For a while it seemed like we were mad about the sky, and then the sky becomes our calendar. Moon, sun, stars, like so many to guide us through time. The world crumpling like a dying star.

One morning before the dawn I stood on a clifftop above Beehive Falls in the Grampians. In despair I spread out my arms and uttered a primal cry. The waterfall kept running. The darkness before dawn remained dark.

And then, that glorious sunlight.

In the darkness, there came a turning. It was as though the dark itself offered a leitmotif. At that point I saw just two qualities: an ability to be, and to be attentive. Contemplating that space, I was aware of some presence, aware of souls inhabiting the apparent void, aware of the long and newly dead. There, in that inbetween space, everything seemed to come together. In the light of this inward sun, it all made sense again.

The turning happened. I surrendered to some invisible force. An inner world opened up in me. I began to walk and as I walked I began to speak again. Wotwuwowoosh whoosh whoosh wooo … moon, sun, stars … whoosh … wooo …

My legs walked me to the grey house, the one our hosts call the cabin. The ground crackled under my feet. It was hard to think. On the footpath, a dead bird. I started skipping. Meanwhile, I cried to the skies. Moon. Sun. Stars. Meanwhile, somewhere life had just begun.

When I pushed open the door of the cabin father and son, wrapped in patchwork doona, were reading The Giant Book of Trucks.

I would have to cook breakfast. The man would want bacon and eggs. The child would want pancakes. We would need steaming hot coffee and hot chocolate. Tra la la la la. I have lost my place in the world. Tra la la la la.

I foxed my way though the living room and down a dim corridor of deepening greys.

In the master bedroom’s half-light, the threefold mirror shows off its dusty face across two cracks. In the faint light I turn away from liquid ash as a child turns in vain around her own reflection. Plonk myself down on the bed, adjust the pillow behind my back, pick up the notebook and the pencil from the bedside table and scribble.

(M)otherwise

Womb with a view (navel gazing) — nothing to do with it
Tomb with a view (too specific to account for narrative-artistic impulse)
The blind leading the blind, as usual and I must remember to ditch that overcooked book.
Reading in Braille

Against the heavy sky day after day you live
and look for words under your own eyelids.

In the darkness comes a turning
where everything leads to this
inbetween, this inward sun.

And so you write the way you hang
the washing out, pegs in your mouth
knowing full well it’s not Monday.

The sun dictates our daily tasks
and the prayers that rise towards the newly dead
like butterflies surrendering to every breath.

Hmm. Butterflies surrendering to every breath of air sounds like a European conceit … like rose flower petals, etc. Our roses are black though. Like stars turned black holes. Tra la la la la.

The star turned black hole: the one whose gravity prevents any light from escaping.

And now breakfast: pancakes for everyone. Here I go back to my place, in a cloud of smoke.

Only to realise things have shifted.

The father has made coffee and is busy with his Sudoku.

The child is drawing in charcoal on the walls of the cabin. He draws a lion under a canopy of stars which look all the more dramatic because of the natural yellow colour all over the walls that create a swirling caramel effect.

I take a mixing bowl from the drying rack and place it on the bench next to the pantry cupboard. My hands open the cupboard as I think of ink. The right hand reaches for the flour container and as it does I get a whiff of vanilla and cloves. The hand finds the cup and the cup ploughs in the flour, scoops it up and dips it in the bowl. Hands make a well. Find eggs and milk in the fridge. Break three eggs, pour two cups of milk. Stir. Whisk. Add a tablespoon of oil.

Meanwhile, I think of ink.

In the Renaissance it was desirable to have ink that not only travelled seductively across the paper, but also smelled wonderful. To make writing the sensual experience scholars desired they experimented with vanilla, cloves, honey, locusts, the virgin pressing of olives, powdered mother of pearl, scented musk, rhinoceros horn, jade, jasper, pine, wine …

Almost forgot the secret ingredient: water. Oil in the pan. Heat. Swirl it around so it won’t stick. Now. Shprshhhhhhh!

Hebborn’s recipe for ink is versatile; the result a variety of hues from deep yellow to black. Mix water or wine with gum Arabic, galls and coconut kernels and leave the stew covered under warm sunlight for several days. Rotten acorns as good as gall. As for the wine, be preferred to drink it rather than add it to the brew.
First pancake black. Turn down the heat.

Our days are bracketed now, or so it seems to me.
The father shot a rabbit last night and skinned it. I cooked it with prunes. The child spared the bones and tomorrow he will patiently put them together again.
As I finished the washing up and the man read to the child after dinner the sun had set, bringing the sky low and spreading thin clouds into the corners of the horizon where the light was still standing. It was getting dark now. The sun had dipped below the side of the mountain and I imagined the sky in the west was draining quickly into the falls. I felt compelled to go back to Beehive Falls.
It was a cloudless night and the moon was surfacing above the top of the hill, casting before it a net of brightness that crept up and up and made new shadows in the ground. Halfway up the hill I stopped in the cover of a twisted she-oak that was leaning over the path, the smell of teatree and eucalypt and humus straining my nostrils. And there he was: the angel stood in the middle of the path, swaying on his feet as he looked straight ahead, oblivious to the world of the living. I stood still as he shifted from one foot to the other, then set off into the shadows. I hung back, realising I had lost him. Above me lay the iridescent outline of the hill, barely lit up with the sinking sun.
We are back where we call it home, our cream crépi house in Melbourne and as both father and child sleep it suddenly hits me. Here is my desk. Here is where I have existed for so many years. Here is the crude palimpsest of my being since setting foot in this country. I open the top drawer. Instead of encountering the familiar soft-rough feel of manila folders, my fingers meet the cold of a plastic pouch. The pouch, I see and now also recall, contains a pale yellow matinee jacket and matching bootees knitted in angora wool I salvaged from the charity bag when our baby’s clothes and toys were being packed away. The wool is soft and unctuous. It smells of caramel.
Tomorrow is Tuesday. Garbage day. I have some work to do.
Tuesday 8.02, July 29 1994. I sit in jubilation as I watch the garbos pack up and trash the box labelled ‘Last draft and floppy disks for Exile Down Under.’ Inexplicably, I find poise and presence and being. Then there is the momentarily arrested gasp of surprise.
The child, I forget to say, is with me. And he laughs with me, too, as the box disappears in the crushing backside of the truck.