

De Minimis

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In Memoriam

Tilly Houghton 3 October 1992 - 29 June 2020

This special issue of De Minimis commemorates the writing of Tilly Houghton. The 2020 editors would like to extend a special thanks to 2018 editors Duncan Willis and Janelle Kob, for returning to editorial duty to pitch us this project, and collating those pieces of Tilly's writing that reflect her voice and the passion she brought in every word she wrote. On behalf of the entire De Minimis family across the years, we would like to dedicate this issue to her memory.

For anybody who finds themselves in need of support, we urge you to take advantage of any of the resources offered by the university or public health services, or to speak to your family and friends. It is always ok to ask for help.

The 2020 Team

Unimelb Counselling Services: 8344 6927 Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 Lifeline: 13 11 14

A Note from the Editors

Duncan Willis and Janelle Kob

On 29 June 2020, we lost Tilly Houghton.

Tilly was an ex-MLS student, and she was also so much more. She was a passionate activist who pounded the pavement for many causes; disability rights, refugee rights, indigenous rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and mental health, just to name a few. More than an activist, she was an advocate for the rights of others. She loved the law, and believed deeply in the law's potential to redress injustices (with a healthy dose of cynicism, of course). Throughout her life, she attempted to address those injustices in innumerable ways. Lucky for us, writing was one of them.

During Tilly's time at MLS, she was a prolific writer for De Minimis. In memory of Tilly's contributions to this paper and to the wider law school community, we have published this special edition of her work.

This collection of pieces highlights some of Tilly's qualities that will be most sorely missed. Her keen critical eye that questioned everything; her willingness to confront the hard issues or call out injustices (including those perpetrated by this paper); her exceptional sense of humour; and the way she wore her heart on her sleeve and made no apologies for it.

In this collection we have also included what we understand to be Tilly's last published piece, 'My Feelings are Orchestral'. This essay is a piece about Tilly's mental illness and her struggles with attempted suicide, but more than that, it was a story about a girl whose feelings were an ocean. Yes, there was grief, pain, and trauma, but there was also music, family, beauty and love. She did not lose sight of any of it, and neither should we.

While Tilly may no longer be with us, she and the impact she had on the people who came into her life will never be forgotten. We love you, Tilly - rest in peace.

Duncan and Janelle are ex-MLS students and were the 2018 Editor-In-Chief and Managing Editor of De Minimis.



Advocacy and justice for indigenous Australians were deeply important to Tilly. With permission, we would also like to reprint an Acknowledgement of Country delivered by De Minimis alumnus and friend, Tyson Holloway Clarke.

Fitzroy, Brunswick, Carlton, and the greater Melbourne area sit on the lands of the Wurundjeri and the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nations, where their laws, traditions and culture live on and sovereignty was never ceded. We also recognise everyone else reading from other Countries, wherever you may be. We acknowledge Country on this day for two reasons. First because this Country meant something to Tilly, and second because Tilly meant something to this Country. This Country was Tilly's home for a time. A home where she met friends, lovers and mentors. This city gave Tilly a great deal, and in return Tilly gave a great deal back to those who needed it most. The Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri have one law they wish for all who step on the land to abide. That is to look after this Country, look after its children, and it will look after you. Tilly embodied that law and this Country will miss her dearly. As Bunjil and Waa fly overhead, we acknowledge Country.

My Anxiety and I Are Doing Great, Thanks.

August 01, 2016

Before I started law, I asked a JD-Graduate friend of mine what I should be prepared to expect at law school.

She said, “Imagine a group of Type A overachievers being thrown together in a pressure cooker.”

And I was like yeah fuck well, I’ve already written an honours thesis about suicide so I’m set. And I was, in the sense that I had already done hours upon hours upon hours of reading and spent plenty of nights in my pyjamas, crying in front of *The Bachelor* while eating peanut butter from the jar with a spoon. What has surprised me about the JD is a) how much I’ve come to love my peers and b) how much I compare myself to my peers. I had this mantra for a while that went: don’t fucking compare yourself to others, idiot, and now it is: DO NOT FUCKING COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS. DO NOT. STOP IT. Idiot.

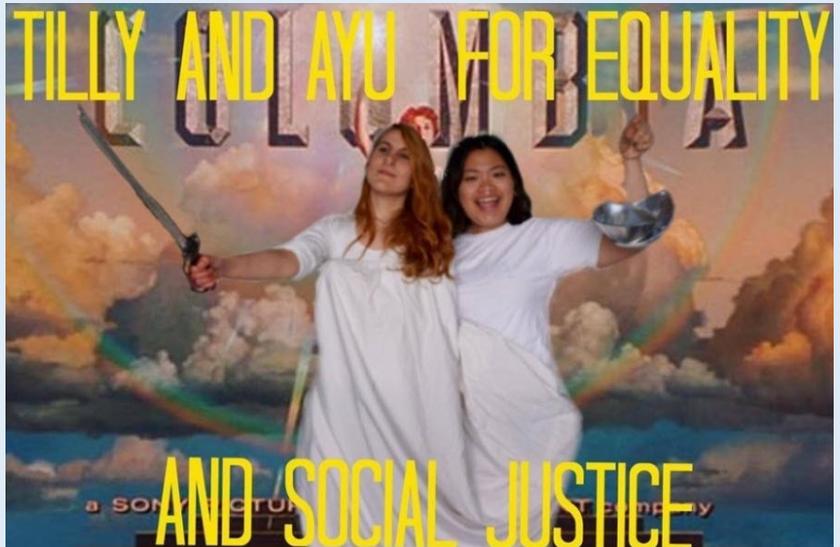
Enter my anxiety. We’re best friends. We’ve known each other since before I embraced the fact that I am, and always will be, a sad queer girl. Ours is an uneasy relationship in the sense that she has been known to make me cry on the tram, but when bad shit actually happens she’s like “you’ve got this, remember? We rehearsed it.” And I say, “Yeah and I didn’t get to sleep until 4am that night.” I am what you would call a functional wreck. Here, look:

Obligations exam? Probs failed (Didn’t).
New friends? They’ll realise I’m not funny and boring in a fortnight (Didn’t).
Ask a question in class? That’s a fucking dumb question (Wasn’t).
Ask her on a date? She won’t respond (Didn’t).

The fear of failure is there, and I’ve accepted that, thanks to genetics, it’s not going to ever disappear. What is harder to do is find ways of coping that are both sustainable in the long term, and not self-destructive.

Enter therapy. Everyone should have therapy. It taught me Mental Health 101 things like: exercise, sleep, eat more/smoke less, and practice yoga maybe. These are obvs standard existing things, but you would be surprised at how quickly a deficit in one can result in you crying on the lawns while listening to *Childish Gambino* (I’m a really big advocate for crying in public, btw).

The Law School has implemented plenty of programs that help in this respect (still not going to go running at 8:30am though), but the nature of the degree and nature of the field means that mental health issues have the capacity to run rampant if they’re not counteracted by an environment where students know that they can speak to people about whatever is making them feel a bit sad. It’s a tricky coin in the sense that, speaking to a lecturer or similar mentor is cool and can be helpful, but other times you just need to hear it from someone who knows how fucking horrible it is trying to read and understand a difficult concept (see: consideration, ADR).



What I’m getting at is that if not everyone, then certainly a large number of people, will have a day this semester where they are internally screaming or amazed that they got to uni on time. That’s so fine and we all know it’s fine, but also, no two people have the same means of dealing with their shit. If someone says, “I’m having a fkn shitty day mate,” and you say “Just stay positive and think of all the beautiful things in the universe, Namaste babe,” they’re probably going to think “Gee wow thanks, didn’t realise I could just posi-vibe my way out of my very real concerns about my student debt and employment prospects”.

I am certainly not anti-positive thinking, but mental health is one area where I do have the confidence to say: I know my shit, and this can be frustrating to hear. If the only answer to student wellbeing is to be happy and drink more green tea, there’s a likely chance that a great number of the anxious/depressed student populace will feel more isolated. Be supportive, sure, but let people have control over how they respond to stress, and how they find means of coping with the next few years. See someone getting upset in class because maybe the discussion marginalises their experience? Say something. See someone looking kind of shitty in line for a coffee? Don’t say something, maybe they’re tired and don’t want to talk. See someone having a cigarette on a milk crate next to the entrance crying and obviously listening to *Beyoncé*? That’s just me. Come say hey.

Tilly Houghton is a first year JD student who spends a lot of time thinking about bread, and Winona Ryder.

(Tell 'Em) Shove It

August 22, 2017

During the obligatory call home to Mama and Papa this weekend, Dad asked me if I was enrolled to vote. I said yes, and asked, knowing full well what the answer would be, what his vote would be.

“No, obviously.”

I've been out to my parents for close to a decade. When I did tell them, it was after a Pride rally, and in tears, I told my mum first. She was, and always has been, completely fine—bar some concern about the discrimination I would face in life. Dad, being a Catholic so staunch that he believes that George Pell is being slandered by the left wing media, warned me “not to shove it down people's throats.”

In the spirit of attempting to understand that people are idiosyncratic and complex, and that their opinions may cause harm without them meaning for it to be so, I asked him not “Why,” but “What has been an era with social cohesion and equality?” His answer was the 1950s.

See, back then, people valued the family. People valued togetherness and community. Identity politics and political correctness were but distant abstract concepts with no meaningful weight to add to public discourse. I noted that gay people did exist and, thinking of Alan Turing (who was chemically castrated because his sexuality was deemed ‘gross indecency’ under British law of the day), were subjugated in nearly every aspect of their existence.

“No, they just existed and nobody minded. They weren't making the scenes they are today. The gays didn't even want marriage. They wanted to disband marriage. But now they want to destroy marriage from the inside.”

Call him an isolated example on the fringes—one who will never be convinced through any amount of campaigning or persuasion—but it is an example of the logic from the ‘No’ voters. Call me a cynic, but I'm not actually convinced that LGBTIQ people are as accepted as the wider metropolitan public would like to believe (if you don't believe me, I invite you to walk down Sydney Rd holding the hand of someone who shares your gender). When we say that we need to reason with the other side, and win the fight through the strength of persuasion, I've no need to wonder at whose expense this will be. LGBTIQ elders are astounding in how much work they have done for this community, but for those in rural areas, or with religious par-

ents, or who are yet to come out (or all of the above, as was my case), this plebiscite will be horrendous.

No, we didn't reach where we are today without a longstanding campaign to win over hearts and minds, as one anonymous De Minimis commenter wrote last week. But we sure as shit didn't get here by politely asking, either. Before Stonewall, there was the Mattachine society. After the AIDS crisis (let us never forget that it was once deemed ‘gay cancer’) there was ACT UP. In this country, systemic homophobia saw many of the deaths caused by gay-hate bashings across major cities go unprosecuted by police, and ignored by the wider public. It is, quite frankly, ahistorical rubbish to hold the view that, with regards to the LGBTIQ community, ours were rights that gradually shifted over time by patiently listening to bigotry and using logic and reason to combat it. Everything we have now is the result of an unimaginable amount of pain and anger; ultimately, it is because of the refusal of those before us to stay in the margins.

Sure, people will vote yes. People will vote no. A larger majority than I think we realise will abstain from voting at all, and in the midst of this, the underlying conclusion is that ours is a Parliament that cannot act as it has been prescribed to do. It is supposed that it is the ‘will of the people’ embodied in the election of our executives, and yet each government has failed to take any meaningful action in spite of the fact that a wide majority of Australians support Marriage Equality (though I have my doubts). Contrast that with the ease in which Howard's amendment to the Marriage Act managed to pass through, and perhaps you'll understand why I am wary at best about the results of this plebiscite—if it goes ahead at all. Equality takes time—but for a near-decade of rallying, engaging Parliamentarians, and arguing against proponents, I've finished tolerating poor logic that I'm expected to brush off with ease. If an aspect of my identity is to be politicised in this way, then I will abso-fucking-lutely appeal with emotion, as well as reason. I owe my current ability to hold hands with my girlfriend in public to trans women throwing bricks at cops—not from trying to convince Turnbull that I'm Just Like Him.

Tilly Houghton is a second-year JD student who isn't so much 'Okay to be Gay' as she is 'Seize the Means of Production and while you're at it, do it covered in glitter.'

You Can Commit to Justice in Your Career

October 17, 2017

That every person before the Court has the right to representation is a fundamental principle for the legal system—if it is to be a just legal system. But in a democratic society that adheres to the free market, this, in practice, looks markedly different: the resources available to a powerful defendant are in many cases superior to those of the plaintiff seeking the jurisdiction of the Court. We all know this, but as the offers for clerkships come out very shortly, it may be worth re-asking the question: why did you choose to study law?

For a great many of you, it was (and remains) to make a substantive difference to society in a way that leaves the world a slightly better place. Perhaps when you started PPL and learned about the extent and limitations of international law, of domestic sovereignty, and of the legislature, the idea of challenging the powers that be became an overwhelming thought. Suddenly, your first fee notice stacked on top of your undergrad fees began to make you anxious, and you recalled that faint doubt you tossed aside that the legal industry is a competitive one for a graduate. Enter the clerkship process.

Now you're looking through the firms to see who does what pro bono work, and how those sectors align with your own values. The clean, aesthetic graphs breaking down the number of hours and the areas reached give you a sense that it is certainly possible to pay off your debt and get experience and make a positive difference; but make no mistake; it rarely looks like this in practice. A top-tier firm may have done enormously beneficial work for women in the legal industry, or for diversity, whilst simultaneously defending a corporation that has actively contributed to human rights abuses either domestically or abroad. It may have contributed enormous resources to funding mental health programs or wellbeing initiatives, while also providing key counsel for the Commonwealth on matters of immigration. A firm is a firm, but a firm is a power structure which serves its own interests, and those are usually those of the client with the most money to spend.

Yes, it is nearly inescapable—but only to an extent. All of this is information that is publicly available to anyone who wishes to find it. It is unreasonable to expect that any law student with a potential graduate position on the table disregard it solely because an enormous firm with hundreds of solicitors may have acted on a case that is against your moral position. However, it is equally as unreasonable to expect that just because a law firm does pro-bono work, that it is immediately absolved of the other wrongs it perpetuates. Remember why you got into law in the first place, and ask yourself if you're really, genuinely happy to be in an environment where that is a nominal at best part of the work that you will be doing.

It is understandable that at this point in semester we aren't in the

practice of putting time aside to contemplate our moral limits. Any offer you get this week is a product of a lot of hard work and should be celebrated. Please don't forget, however, that you are promising, intelligent, capable, thoughtful—and even marketable—and that the decisions we collectively make regarding how we want our careers to play out as we leave MLS will shape the legal landscape in this country.

Taking back agency in this wild process means noting the following in relation to the firm you are 'considering' an offer from: are they are currently representing a client or cause that you find to be morally dubious? You might have to do a little digging. They probably didn't boast about it at the interview or on the page of their clerkship brochure opposite their pro bono program.

Taking back agency might look something like this:

Make a list:

- of organisations who you would under no circumstances wish to represent;
- of organisations who you feel like you couldn't do your best work for if asked to;
- of organisations who you would feel ashamed to tell your non-law friends that you worked for. E.g. for you this might be representing the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in refugee matters, for others it might be representing a multinational mining or oil company.
- Find out if your future employer currently does this work using the sources you have access to. Eg. See relevant Federal Court decisions.
- If yes, consider how you would respond if asked or required to do this work.
- If no, still consider how you might respond if asked or required to do this work at an early stage in your career, in a new work environment and with limited experience.
- Visualise articulating your response to someone powerful and intimidating (try Peter Dutton or a commercial law partner of your choice)
- Remember why you chose to study law.

We wish you the best of luck when offers come out. We also hope that your career, whatever you envisage it to be, is one that you have actively shaped not according to the perceived successes of working in a particular firm or area, but through your own reflection on your values, your ideals, and your commitments to justice.

Tilly Houghton and Jaynaya Dwyer are second-year JD students, this article is written in their capacity as committee members of Law Students for Refugees

Sovereignty was never ceded, why cede solidarity?

March 06, 2018

Each January 26, the Invasion Day rally gets bigger, the momentum visibly gaining, and people seem to be more aware of why (even if they like sitting in a paddle pool all day sinking tallies and punching darts*), the date could change. Even in the wake of knowing the extents and limitations of native title, I'm hopeful that we will eventually get to a treaty. That we will recognise the value of Indigenous ontologies in solving problems and that perhaps, maybe, they won't be distorted by private enterprise too quickly. That the Commonwealth will make concerted efforts to work with leaders within communities and not against them in developing policy. The idea for this article started as a desire to analyse the characteristically cynical discomfort I have for the forms of virtue-signalling that consist of posting photos of the Invasion Day rally to social media. But without solidarity, we're all fated to spend another few decades getting distracted by the divisiveness of the current political climate. Solidarity entails mutual responsibility and interdependency. That, to my mind, means knowing that there are rightfully many people who are angered at the current discourse on changing the date because it detracts from the glaring inadequacies of the present system. If the onus is placed on Indigenous people to discuss and challenge continued inequities, then that burden is placed on a statistically small number of people – some of whom may be tired of continuing the call for change alone.

We need look no further than last year's anniversary of the Royal Commission into deaths in custody, or the death of Elijah Doughty, to understand that the rights of Indigenous peoples in this country need to be brought into focus more often than the 26th. We are only now beginning to understand the history of this continent in a

way that acknowledges the effects of genocide, displacement, and intergenerational trauma on Indigenous populations. If we had any common sense as a country, we'd acknowledge the rich, fascinating cultures that have existed here since time immemorial, and take pride in the fact that this is a nation with a strong history, from which we could learn a great deal—if we had the common sense.

Race is a focal point of the national discourse at present. When the discussion of Indigenous recognition results in a bipartisan “perhaps we *do* need to think about this,” when former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd decides that perhaps Manus and Nauru weren't as good an idea as was anticipated, and when racial discrimination is as prevalent as ever, the emerging conclusion is that without solidarity, we will not make any progress. Being a student at Melbourne Law School imports a responsibility that comes from receiving this education. That is, a commitment to justice, and to integrity. The onus is on you to use the skills that you have for the benefit of, and in solidarity with people who need it—it's a remarkably simple concept that is often lost in the static of national discourse. For MLS, it gets lost in the idea that the law is, in every instance, the great equaliser. The fact that a small, but vocal, corner of the *De Minimis* comments section still questions Indigenous sovereignty as a political objective is indicative of the nature of some of the issues we face as a profession. It *is* a political objective (as well as being an indisputable fact) because law *itself* is political – but the focus on the judicial branch of government obscures this aspect of what many of us will go on to do.

Somehow, the idea that one must believe in the brotherhood of man was lost. In its wake, what is left is a deeply angry and divided nation. In the absence of leader-

ship, the gauntlet has instead been thrown at the feet of the Australian populace. As people who will one day have a tangible effect on how this country is to develop, we share that responsibility. The unchecked cynicism I have as to why it is that each year, my social media is flooded with hashtags to #changethedate when the entire system feels irreparably broken. Perhaps it comes down to the idea that performative allyship, as a problem to be addressed, would be too easy. Yes, we owe it to the owners of this land to make a concerted effort to ensure that the sovereignty among all Indigenous groups is recognised. My discomfort lies in the fact that it can often become an all too easy demonstration of the *goodness* of the white people at rallies. Is this too cynical of me? Prove me wrong—but aside from that hashtag, what else have we done to assist the people who could benefit from our voices?

Collectively, we're getting there. The general populace has started scrutinising the extent of racism and violence that has previously characterised the history of this nation. Yes, we'll get to a treaty. Immigration politics will shift. Race will cease to be a means of gaining political favour in the lead up to elections. But it will take the collective efforts of the entire population to get there. And, more importantly, it will take self-reflection on the part of everyone who has benefited from systemic racism to make a change. It only takes humility, respect, and the desire to help the people we should be grateful towards. Always was, always will be.

*You can take the girl out of Queensland...

How I got through Law School

August 07, 2018

You may have noticed that when I am punching darts on the curbside, I have headphones on. Here is a snapshot of what I've been listening to since February 2016. It is:

I) Not exhaustive, these are just the songs / albums / artists that had high rotation that semester;

II) Super fucking gay;

III) Indicative that while I definitely listen to new music, it very much centres around what was big from 2009 – 2014.

The playlist on repeat throughout the whole of law school:

- ◆ Stromae - 'Alors on Danse'
 - ◇ "Qui dit "dette" te dit huissier, oui dit assis dans la merde"
- ◆ Sufjan Stevens (but sparingly, because too much leads to a nervous breakdown)
- ◆ Toto – 'Africa'
- ◆ Enya 'Orinocco Flow'
- ◆ Madonna - 'Ray of Light'
- ◆ Cher - 'Believe'
- ◆ Bikini Kill 'Rebel Girl'
- ◆ Gloria Jones - 'Tainted Love'
- ◆ LCD Soundsystem 'Yeah (Crass Version)'
- ◆ Carly Simon – 'You're So Vain'
- ◆ iiO – 'Rapture'
- ◆ Everything by Destiny's Child

LMR

- ◆ Chopin's Nocturnes. This was in the days before the piano, and it's actually so nice when someone starts playing a song in the middle of the afternoon.
- ◆ Missy Elliott – Everything, but mostly 'Get ur freak on' and 'Pass that Dutch'
- ◆ Kelis – *Tasty*
- ◆ Azealia Banks: 1991, Van Vogue, 212. I'm so sad she turned out to be such a mean / problematic person because her EP was great.

Year One, Semester One

- ◆ Beyoncé – *Lemonade*
 - ◇ The album dropped a few weeks before my first round of law exams ever. I was so nervous about PPL that I woke up at 4:00am and listened to the whole album on loop until the moment I walked through the doors of the REB.
- ◆ I'm Kind of Ashamed to admit I also listened to a lot of Crystal Castles.
- ◆ I'm Less Ashamed to admit I also listened to a lot of David Bowie.

Song of the semester: Hot Sugar feat. Antwon, Lakutis, Big Baby Ghandi – 'Mama, I'm a man'

- ◇ "I'm doing good, my pasta got four cheeses, you cheesy if you think you working harder than me, bitch"

Year One, Semester Two

- ◆ FKA Twigs *LP1*
- ◆ *The Big Chill* Soundtrack
- ◆ Noname *Telefone*
- ◆ Santigold *99c*
- ◆ Grimes *Art Angels*

Year Two, Semester One

- ◆ Childish Gambino: everything, but mostly *Because the Internet* and 'Heartbeat'
- ◆ Sezzo Snot – this is a DJ so I'm not sure if it counts but her mixes are great and she introduced me to Habits
- ◆ Habits – *Ugly Cry*
- ◆ Veruca Salt – *Eight Arms to Hold You*
- ◆ Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds – *Abbattoir Blues / Lyre of Orpheus*
- ◆ Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds – *Push the Sky Away*

Year Two, Semester Two

- ◆ Sampha - *Process*
- ◆ The *Cruel Intentions* Soundtrack
- ◆ Hole, *Live Through This*
- ◆ Hole, *Celebrity Skin*
- ◆ Tori Amos *Under the Pink*
- ◆ The discography from *Queer As Folk*
 - ◇ Listening to Heather Small ask you what you've done to feel proud today really makes you think about it. Especially when it's in the middle of the Criminal Law Take Home.
 - ◇ Notable songs: 'Dive in the Pool' 'Let's Hear it for the Boy' and 'Spin Spin Sugar'

- ◆ A genre called Italo Disco. Clio's 'Faces' exemplifies it best.
- ◆ Angel Haze – 'Werkin Girls'

Year Three, Semester Two

- ◆ Still on my Italo Disco phase. Get tf on that, great for bedroom dancing.
- ◆ I also recently got busted listening to 'Love Shack' by the B52's *reaaaaaally loudly* but let's be real, 80s trash music is great, you can't tell me that 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' isn't a queer anthem in the wake of *San Junipero* (which you should watch if you haven't and then argue with me about it at the pub).

Year Three, Semester One:

- ◆ Lots of Kendrick Lamar across most of his work
- ◆ Fiona Apple's entire discography, most notably 'Not about Love' (lesbian breakups are great, ya'll), 'The Way Things Are' and 'Paper Bag'
- ◆ PJ Harvey – 'Man Size'



My Feelings are Orchestral.

October 04, 2019

I

The last time I held my sister's hand was February. We communicate by touching. I take her hand for no reason other than this: that I want her to hold my hand. We had a good eight hours of driving back from Charleville, in the shared backseat of the White Holden Commodore my parents have owned for several years now. Around two hours into the nine-to-twelve-ish hour drive, I'll poke out my tongue at her, and in turn she'll show me how good she is at touching her nose with her tongue. I'll poke the side of her head for no reason other than to see how she responds. She'll rest her head on my shoulder for a moment before returning to her iPad.

Every time I speak to her on the phone from Melbourne, part of the conversation goes as follows:

"You're my favourite sister, Luce."

"You're my favourite sister too, but you're my only sister. Of course you're my favourite sister."

"You're my favourite sister. The best sister."

"You're my favourite sister. My best sister. My older sister?"

II

Each morning from Monday to Friday, I walk along Little Collins Street and watch the way the light hits the skyscrapers. There are days where it feels as though the sensations the world creates are the sole reason for being. One Tuesday, it rained so lightly that I cried at how gentle the world could be, if it willed itself to be. On other days, the hours refuse to move. The revulsion of people moving without purpose along the street leaves me questioning why I was ever born.

The first experience I had of dissociation was in Paris.

You are dropped in the centre of an enormous glass fishbowl, and the world is painted on the outside. It does not matter which direction you walk – you will never reach the edges. Glass is often an analogy used for patients who experience dissociation. It would take another five years until this sensation was explained to me by a psychiatrist.

Look at the words emerge from your mouth. Look at yourself witnessing them, but you, are behind a seven-inch pane of glass. Now situate yourself at work, being the facilitator of a monthly teleconference that you are required to do as a part of your job.

Watch as you relay messages and thoughts about the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, but the minutes on the right-hand corner of the screen don't move.

You want this outward professionalism to finish, and it won't. And so you go outside to try to regain some sense of reality. It doesn't arrive for another three days. You believe at that moment that you are actually experiencing psychosis. You believe in earnest that you will in the coming weeks be fired for being so fucked in the head.

III

The last time I tried to hang myself was this August. The note, prefaced "not misadventure," is buried in a stack of paper in the garage. I failed again and the next day, I went to work and managed my client load with a bruise on my thigh and a sore neck. It made no sense to tell anyone about the incident given that they're statistically likely to happen every four months on average.

If the pain that people experience in living could be properly articulated, the rates of domestic violence, suicide, substance abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional manipulation, et cetera, would not be such as they are across the country. Locate where trauma manifests in the body. Mine often feels as though it is a rock, tied to a rope looped somewhere below where the jaw meets the neck. People who experience emotional distress associated with PTSD and the variants of personality disorders that follow often refer to how their emotions crack open their ribcages and burrow into their torsos. I am among those who share that queer sensation of taut emptiness where words ought to emerge. There is meant to be more to being alive, but the reasons I make now aren't as compelling as they were when I was fifteen.

I hadn't been to Venice then. Hadn't had my heart irrevocably broken. Hadn't spent wine-soaked nights on the couches of people I don't know anymore. Hadn't sat cross legged on the lap of the person I thought I'd have two dogs and an upmarket bedspread with and looked into her eyes with my hand on her cheek. Hadn't stood in front of a gaggle of academics and made a somewhat reasonable case for the law of crowds. Hadn't met The Duchess of Sussex. Hadn't gone to a party in a Long Island City apartment on impulse with a man so beautiful I was amazed that he was even real. But maybe all that isn't enough.

The psychologist says that the sound in my head of my parents' incessant nagging, "You will never be enough," will always be there. But perhaps, says the psychologist, the volume of this voice can be turned down, and others turned up. I think of a guitar amp, the dial on zero, and I panic: "what other voices are there?"

IV

I have had four glasses of wine when we enter Hamer Hall to watch Nick Cave. Tonight, he's performing with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. I adore every moment but am cognisant of wanting the concert to end. If ever there were an apt demonstration of the Theory of Relativity, it would be an orchestral performance. Will the show go for an hour? Ninety minutes? How long does that feel like in the dark, at any rate?

Cave sits at the piano and is projected onto the panels behind the orchestra. The rings on his fingers are beautiful and imposing; the live screen closes in on his hands. He is the reason we are all here, but he doesn't do much. He plays a few chords in slow succession, as the strings carry him along. He, too, is in his own cocoon of grief.

I need to piss. I cross my legs over again and again, watching the orchestra, observing the choir in the corner that have only stood twice thus far to add a few 'ooooohs'. The pieces being performed are film scores that Cave has worked on throughout his career: all Southern Gothic. We see excerpts from films for which he has composed scores throughout his career: stretches of desert and wide

blue skies that are almost indistinguishable from the landscape of the drive from Brisbane to Charleville. I know that I will return to my grandparents' graves one day, but do not know when, how, or under what circumstances.

At some point, perhaps during *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, my mind begins to wander. I start thinking about whether the tympanists are the voice of my father telling me not to shove my sexuality down people's throats. Perhaps it is the backup piano that represents my rum-drunk mother screaming into my face that I will amount to nothing more than a drug addict who will overdose in a gutter one day. And what, then, would my parents' denial that these events ever took place sound like? I almost reached a revelation when the crowd starts cheering. The show is over. I can piss.

V

There is something about viewing a corpse that feels like an imposition: here is the woman who chastised my parents for being too harsh with me. Here, in the cold room of the sole funeral parlour in the Shire of Murweh, lies the woman who argued with my parents about the chores I was expected to do:

"Give the damn girl a break," to my mother, who would retire to bed without a word.

"I'll do the dishes tonight, Lulu. Just make a me a cup of tea, darling, and we can have a cigarette when I've finished drying off the pots and pans."

Thus spoke the matriarch, and thus she did each time she was staying with us in Brisbane. Not once did this woman, the fierce, whipsmart lover of crosswords and cigarettes, give a shit about the fact that I felt love for other women. Not once did she tell me that I was a failure, a disgrace, or a stupid little bitch.

Rather, she'd talk about the people she encountered when she and Grandpa ran a pub out near the border of Queensland and the Northern Territory, over a Horizon cigarette on the back deck.

VI

Convincing my sister to leave the room for our Grandma's funeral became a game that she won. Who could get their shoes on the fastest? Who could be downstairs first? The Catholic Classics were played at the church procession: *Ave Maria*, *Nearer My God to Thee*. But, ever the woman with humour, the song that was played as Grandma was lowered into the ground was 'The Entertainer'. Watch as the crowd of repressed older people tried to decide how to respond to the absurdity: a group of men from the Returned Services League in the dry February of an outback Queensland cemetery, standing and sweating in full uniform with their hats down. By the third verse (perhaps it had been three minutes by then?), long after the coffin had reached the bottom of the grave, I laughed aloud. The song kept playing, and nobody knew what to do about it.

As the mourners gathered to throw in their poppies and their dust, I waited toward the back of the line while keeping an eye out for Best Sister and how she was handling the emotion of the day. She had her face in my Aunt's chest and didn't want to be there, but there she was, as best she could be. When my turn came to throw in some earth, I made sure there was a pinch of tobacco there too. Just in case.

VII

I will hang myself before the age of twenty-seven. I will hang myself somewhere in the year of twenty-seven. I will make it to thirtysomething before accidentally overdosing on prescription pharmaceuticals. I will leave a note that says sorry to my sister. I will not leave a note and hope that the people I love can read between the lines and distribute my assets among themselves. I will wait until my sister has died before I go. It doesn't matter if I go before my sister. She and I barely speak now because speaking to her is predicated on speaking to my parents, which I tend to avoid as much as possible. She will understand, in some way. She will never understand, and the grief of my leaving will inflict unbearable damage on the sole person in this world who will never abandon me.

I may hang myself tonight, or tomorrow, or in a month, or in a year. I may learn how to deal with what I am and die by accident some day in thirty or forty years. But the possibility of leaving the world is always there: and one day—one day, I might take it. Nobody, myself included, knows when. I think of A.D. Hope's poem 'The Unknown Anniversary' some mornings on the walk up Little Collins Street. Where in the performance I am, I cannot know, but the tether I have to this world is my older sister. She, I decide, is the entire string ensemble: precision, gentle hands, and a form of grace that only exists outside of words.

