



**2014** *On the edge*



# OutStanding

*Australia's annual LGBTI short story competition*

*All the prize winners plus the highly commended entries*



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## OUTSTANDING

### AUSTRALIA'S PREMIER LGBTQI CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

**EARLY IN 2013** a committee was formed to propose a short story competition to replace the lapsed Mardi Gras event. The committee (Robert Tait, Rowan Savage, Gail Hewison, Teresa Savage and Laurin McKinnon), called for entries and published the winners on-line (see: [www.outstandingstories.net](http://www.outstandingstories.net) ). Encouraged by many positive responses, we're back this year with another competition featuring more great new writing. Enjoy!

A special thanks to everyone who helped with this project – to those who sponsored prizes, and particularly those individuals who donated the cash prizes. And an extra special thanks to the authors.

Our cash prizes are made possible by the continued support of **LInc – Lesbians Incorporated** (for the second year). **LInc** is a lesbian organisation that gives grants to lesbian friendly projects and events. We are grateful to them for their support.

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## SPONSORS AND PRIZES

### FIRST PRIZE: \$1000 CASH

plus a **gift voucher to a workshop** and  
a **one year membership** from the **NSW WRITERS' CENTRE**  
and **TWO party tickets** to the **2015 MARDI GRAS** party

### SECOND PRIZE: \$200 CASH

plus a **Kindle ebook reader** from **POP SHOP**,  
and a weekend for one at **BLUSHED CREATIVE SPACE** Katoomba  
plus a **one year membership** to the **NSW WRITERS' CENTRE**

### THIRD PRIZE: \$100 CASH

plus a **\$100 book voucher** from the **BOOKSHOP DARLINGHURST**  
and **three Coaching Sessions** from **ARTFUL COACHING**  
plus a **one year membership** to the **NSW WRITERS' CENTRE**

### HIGHLY COMMENDED: \$100 CASH (EACH)

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330 crown street surry hills 2010



Artful Coaching



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## JUDGES REPORT

**WE WERE VERY** happy to receive 107 stories this year, breaking all records, and giving us a huge job to read and reread to reach our decisions. Entries came in from all over Australia and New Zealand.

On The Edge, our theme this year, had us reading some edgy stories with frequent themes of homophobia and transphobia, violence, bullying, bashings, loss, family rejection, HIV AIDS, addiction, and fear. Coming out is still sometimes not easy. The seeming hopeless quest to find love in a culture deep in drugs and alcohol appeared often.

Unlike previous years same-sex marriage was not a big item, but aspects of ageing, dementia, and death were frequently mentioned. And of course there was plenty of fun, humour, hope, courage, mystery, and lots of love, to enjoy in amongst the hard times.

Transgender, Bi and Queer held their own alongside Lesbian and Gay, which is a pleasing development.

Every writer had a story to tell and did it well. Judging was harder than ever before with such variety and numbers. It was difficult to get to a short list, and we would love to see many more stories published on the website. Some stories used every single word of 750, some were only 400 word gems, and several writers used poetry, and rap. An LGBTIQ anthology of short stories would be a possibility.

As judges we wanted to be touched, impressed or surprised, and we always hoped at the end to take a deep breath out and go wow! We felt privileged



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to read the stories submitted, often moved by the rawness and vulnerability shared with us in such varied and imaginative ways.

We think our final 6 definitely have the wow factor and hope you will enjoy hearing or reading them. And we thank everyone who entered, your efforts were much appreciated.

Gail, Robert, and Rowan. September 2014

## JUDGES

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**GAIL HEWISON**, proprietor of The Feminist Bookshop 1982 - 2011, OAM in 2006 for services to community and to emerging authors, with long term interest in supporting and reading queer poets and writers.

**ROBERT TAIT**, author of *Perfect Gay Marriage*, *Trashtown* and *Mardi Gras The Novel*, and is a long-standing member of Sydney's Queerlit community.

**ROWAN SAVAGE** holds degrees in creative writing and sociology. He presently writes for respected US-based online music magazine, *Tiny Mix Tapes*, as well as publishing in academia, and is interested in exploring the connection between creative writing and criticism.



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## RULES:

Check with [www.outstandingstories.net](http://www.outstandingstories.net) for latest information.

1. Stories must be your own work, and not previously published.
2. All stories should have relevance to the broader Australian LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer) community.
3. All stories must relate to the theme in some way.
4. Stories must be 750 words or less. Please include your word count at the end of your story.
5. Stories must be emailed as attachments in Word to [submissions@outstandingstories.net](mailto:submissions@outstandingstories.net)
6. All stories must be received by midnight on Monday 1 September 2014. Late entries will not be accepted.
7. Please include your full name, email address and contact phone number in your submission email.
8. Your name must not appear in headers or footers or anywhere in your story – our judges read all stories in blissful ignorance of the writer's identity.
9. If you submit a story to the competition, you are also giving us permission to publish it.
10. You may submit more than one story.

## FURTHER NOTES

Competition launched on 16 June 2014.

Winners announced 28 September 2014.

Judges were not aware of authors' names while judging.



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## FIRST PRIZE

Ash Rehn *Mothers*

**BILLIE AND STEVIE** are not your regular couple. They meet at the club the year after leaving school. Billie isn't looking for a boy. She doesn't know what she wants.

Stevie flicks his strawberry blonde locks and giggles. *You're fun*, he says. He's dancing in his tennis shorts now his career is over. Someone told him they made him look hot. Billie wears a scarlet skirt with pleats that stops halfway down her thighs. Her legs are big. All her dresses are big. She's a big girl.

*Should we go out?* asks Billie.

*Should we move in together?* asks Stevie.

The other club kids assume she's his fag hag.

*Such an ugly expression*, says Stevie. So he kisses her. The club kids are not impressed.

*What do you think this is? A straight place?*

*Get a room!*

Billie and Stevie are young and on their own in this tourist town where money buys pleasure and strangers come and go. They work nights, if you know what I mean.

*Anything is possible*, says Stevie, swallowing his little blue pill. *But I prefer to be the girl.*



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*You go, girl!* says Billie. She has a latex allergy. *You can watch is all*, she tells the punters. It isn't always like that of course. Money talks.

When they get home they snuggle. Stevie is always little spoon. He can feel Billie's breasts against his shoulder blades. He feels safe in her arms.

Billie cradles her man-boy. She suggests they get naked. *This is new*, says Stevie. Billie gives him a lesson about her body. *Wow, that's amazing! I want one of those!*

Now they are working together. The punters pay more for a double act. Mostly Billie stands guard. She can fill a doorway. She wears black leather and red lipstick, sometimes she holds a strap. It's a strange trinity of businessman, boy and bondage dominatrix.

The baby is a surprise.

*Is it mine?* asks Stevie.

*Of course it's yours*, says Billie.

*Are you keeping it?*

*Of course I am*, says Billie. *I know what I want. What will we call her?*

*Is it a she? Maybe she's an it. Maybe it doesn't know what it wants to be yet.*

Billie gets bigger. Stevie listens to her tummy, his freckled face on her stretch-marks. He can hear the future.



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*We have to stop working, says Stevie.*

*For the baby, says Billie.*

*Yup. For us.*

They both get jobs in a café. They are up to their elbows in foccacia and latte. Dancefloor nights give way to barista mornings. Stevie throws away his little blue pills.

*I want to be a girl, says Stevie.*

*Maybe it will be a boy, says Billie.*

*Not the baby, me! says Stevie. I want to be a girl.*

*Anything is possible.*

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The operations are successful. Neither of them minds the pain. The baby gurgles and Stevie giggles. She breastfeeds from a bottle filled by Billie who stands guard over her family.

*Are we sisters or lovers? asks Stevie.*

*Mothers, says Billie. We're mothers.*



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**ASH REHN:** Recalling anything is possible helps Sydney-based writer and psychotherapist Ash Rehn listen to others for a living. You'll encounter his own inner-demons at [www.ashrehn.com](http://www.ashrehn.com)





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## SECOND PRIZE

**Diana King** *Hilary and Jennifer*

**HILARY STARED THROUGH** the window to the street, at the parking meters, the trees shackled by the footpath. Cars went by in a blur unless halted by cross traffic down the road. It used to be so quiet. She held a mug of tepid tea and looked into it as she brought it to her lips. From the lowering sun, a shaft of light flared on its surface. She glanced up and her face looked back from the window glass, nostrils flaring with disapproval.

She felt it inside, this disapproval, this murmur of unease. She had no idea what initiated it. When did it start? It seemed that she'd always felt like this. She couldn't remember it otherwise.

And why was she waiting? It seemed she'd always been waiting. Panic gripped her often. A sense of falling. Untethered. What day was it? Dear God, what season? Her forehead grew damp and her heart galloped. She lifted her arms to look at her clothing. I'm dressed. When did I dress? Is the sun setting or rising?

An impulse to turn away gathered momentum though she could have just as well and just as happily stood there all day. Stretching her mind, the parts of it that still lived, to some place other than here. Other than now. Some place happy. Some place before.

As her muscles gathered a person appeared from behind the hedge reaching for the gate latch and just like that a notion fell into her head. Shop. Peter is taking me shopping.



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But it was a woman who pushed the gate aside knowing it would grind and catch on the uneven pavers. She was tall, narrow-hipped, attractive with long auburn hair grazing her shoulders. She stopped halfway to the porch distracted by the garden. She wandered off the path, broke off a few dead and dying flower stalks letting them drop to the ground, kicked at the neglected soil then resumed her way brushing her hands on her jeans.

Hilary backed away from the window and looked toward the front door as a key scratched at the lock.

“Mum? Mum it’s me are you ready?”

Hilary put her hand to her chest. This person was not unfamiliar.

“Who.... are you .....?” Her breath grew rapid. Her voice wavered.

Jennifer stopped in her tracks, tossed her bag on an armchair by the door. She looked warily at Hilary who stood stiff and wide-eyed.

“Are you ok mum?”

Jennifer reached out to hug her.

“It’s your birthday tomorrow. I want to get you something really nice. Come on now.”

Hilary pushed ineffectually at Jennifer’s chest. “I want Peter. I want my son. Who are you?”

Jennifer swallowed, softened her tone. “I’m your daughter, mum. Peter’s



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not. He's not with us anymore."

Hilary gasped. Her hands fisted and flew to her temples, tears sprang to her eyes. "Not with us? Where is he? What happened? "

Jennifer again moved to embrace the frail form that threatened to keel over in front of her, tried to push down her own panic, the void blooming in her gut.

"It's alright. Sit down mum, sit down."

She manoeuvred Hilary onto the lounge. Patted the back of her hand. Brought it to her cheek to feel the papery softness of the aging skin. Such trials they had endured together. Long periods of silence, mutual recrimination, screaming matches enough to set the neighbour's dog barking. Denial. Gradual acceptance. A truce and a relationship of sorts.

"It's been twenty years mum."

"Twenty years? What?"

"Tea. I'll make us a cuppa. Here. I brought you a Weekly. Look. Here's Princess Mary with the twins..."

Jennifer made tea while Hilary sat rocking, humming, occasionally turning to watch suspiciously. Jennifer's hands shook, the cups and saucers rattled on the tray as she set it down.

Hilary perked up. A wide smile transformed her features. "I know who you are? You're my mother!"



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"I'm your daughter Mum. I'm Jennifer."

Hilary laughed. "Don't be silly. I don't have a daughter. I only have one child. A son. Where is he mum?"

Jennifer took a folder from the bureau drawer. She sat next to her mother and opened the Memory Book.

"Look mum. I was Peter... this is me. Before..."

Hilary ran her fingers over the image. Looked up into Jennifer's wet sad eyes.

"I want Peter..."

Jennifer was about to lose her mother all over again.

And Hilary her son.

All over again.

**DIANA KING:** Retired architect. Late in life returning to first calling, writing.





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## THIRD PRIZE

**Madeline Shaw** *Rosie*

**MY DESERT BOOTS** were right on the edge. Bathurst St, Sydney – a warm March evening. 1983. I rocked back and forward with a sense of exposure, like I had no edges to keep me in. No-one was looking at me. I knew that. But I seemed to be inwardly blushing anyway, which I did a lot then. Next to me was my newly acquired friend, Rosie. I was 18. Rosie was 27. She didn't say a lot. I met her in a Youth Hostel on the South Western Australian coast.

The youth hostel was like an empty ship. It was like no one had ever been there. A school friend and I had caught the bus from Sydney to Perth – \$90 each way. This was our first youth hostel experience. The front steps were wide and sandy leading up to open French doors. All the window shutters were swung open and swayed in the ocean breeze. The whole building looked like it had been washed in sunlight, salt and sand for hundreds of years.

Warm and worn.

I had never seen anything like it. I felt free there. It didn't have the cramped feeling of youth hostels I later experienced, where the thing you most look forward to is leaving and being back on the streets on your own. In this beachside hostel, gentle people appeared out of sunlit corners clutching maps. Rosie was one of them. She had a vertical scar running up from her top lip and one slightly closed eye. She was slow to answer questions. We became friends.



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The other person I met in that youth hostel was Charlie, a carpenter from Liverpool in England. He was sun bronzed, cheekily handsome and also keen to come and see me in Sydney after he had travelled around Australia. He was 21. We liked chatting to each other. He came to Sydney. We hung out. He wanted to kiss me. This was something that hadn't occurred to me. Unfortunately, it ruined the friendship plans. It seemed I was already a lesbian, although I thought I would be straight and soon to marry. But whenever straightness raised its head I felt odd and moved away. Hopefully, he married in Liverpool and had lots of cheeky kids.

Rosie and I didn't talk about sex or relationships. It just didn't fit on the agenda between us. We talked about bus travel – a lot. How awful it was that people could smoke on buses. What a long way it was from Sydney to Perth – by bus. And what an overwhelmingly long way it was from Perth to Sydney. About other places she had been to in Australia. I admired Rosie. She was big and slow and carried all of her important things in a huge money belt around her waist. She mostly wore the same clothes. She was Scottish and brave. She had saved up all her hard earned money, come all the way to Australia and stayed in Youth Hostels on her own.

Rosie and I were probably going head for head in the social confidence stakes. She stuttered sometimes. We both were prone to blushing. I would



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grow up to find out that I loved talking to people and getting to know them but I didn't know that then. I didn't know that at all.

It was on account of Rosie's courage that we found ourselves teetering on the edge of Bathurst Street on a balmy summer evening. I wouldn't have gone with anyone else who could have assumed that going to Mardi Gras meant that I was definitely gay. Rosie didn't assume things about me because she just didn't work like that. In fact we didn't even talk about anything gay while we were standing there. We didn't talk about anything.

Neat boys in spangled red shorts slinked through their warm up moves. Strong lesbians with body paint and drums thumped out political rhythms. These were the first gay people I had ever seen. One, I noticed, was completely gorgeous.

Standing on that kerb, my life possibilities swirled from schooly blues and greens, from sensible brown and grey pathways to up and down and roundabout delights coloured with radiant gold, purple and red, all backed with disco anthems. I didn't step off the kerb yet. I turned and strolled quietly to Circular Quay with Rosie, chatting, inwardly ecstatic at what could be.



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**MADLINE SHAW** writes short stories that celebrate moments connections and places. She is inspired by writing that gives us hope.





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## HIGHLY COMMENDED

**Andy Boreham** *Concealer*

**I DIDN'T NORMALLY** take calls so early in the morning, but that was the day Josh wanted to book Gaga tickets. He didn't know I was maxed out. "I can be there in twenty," I told the guy at the other end. Before I knew it I was parked outside some suburban house with the morning sun beating down on my face. I flicked down the mirror for one last check. Ugh, I should have brought my concealer. Fuck it.

His lawn was littered with kids' toys. I wonder if his family knew. Dirty bastard. I navigated my way over trucks and around a paddling pool filled with mucky water. I could see his silhouette through the frosted orange-brown glass, moving slowly towards me. He was huge. Great.

But the guy that opened the door was young. A teenager. He wasn't good looking at all, but I could tell he was a nice guy. I can read people like that. He was fat. Really fat.

His room was messy. He had posters of the solar system on the wall, and hanging above his single bed was a model solar system. The Earth is so small, I remember thinking. That awkward moment before seemed to last forever. That bit where you know you're just on the edge. Just about to touch. I could tell he liked me, so decided I'd just push him on the bed and grab for his crotch. He must have been shy 'cos he immediately pushed my hand away and pulled me down.



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"Can we hug?" he asked in a polite tone I wasn't really used to.

I figured he wanted to be the little spoon even though... yeah. He smelt like he'd just had a shower. His hair stunk of passion fruit. We just lay there, on our sides. I had one arm under his neck and one around his waist. Cradled. I was hard. I always get hard. I would have pushed my hard dick against his butt but it felt wrong. Then I heard him sniffle. And again. I lifted my head and caught a tear rolling across his nose. It landed on his white sheet and disappeared into nothing.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Sorry."

"What's wrong?"

He scratched his nose where the tears had tickled and sniffled again.

"This is gonna be my life," he whispered.

"What is?"

"This. Paying people. No one will want me."

I knew what he was saying. "Of course they will!"

"No they won't", he sighed, resigned.

He rolled around to face me. His eyes were red. "Do you want me?" I didn't know what to say but he knew my answer. His stare broke.

He closed his eyes and buried his head in my chest. He breathed in, as if



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he was breathing me.

About half an hour passed and then he asked if I would take my top off. I whipped it off like a pro and lay on my back. Basking. He rested his head on one hand, staring intently, and softly touched my stomach with the other. He seemed obsessed with those V bits on each side of my groin. Then he pulled at my stomach as if he was trying to grab some fat. There was none. My abs looked great – the sunlight was at just the right angle. I felt a little guilty.

His head flopped against my bare chest and he breathed out a giant breath. Then he lay there, motionless.

**22** Before long we were standing at the front door. He apologised for being “emotional” and said he really enjoyed being with me. I felt sorry for him, but at the same time I know what the world is like.

“How much is it?” he asked. At that moment I wondered where he’d got the money from. Pocket money? After school job? It didn’t really matter, I figured, ‘cos it was a business transaction. “Two hundred.”

Those trucks must be his little brother’s.

The car was stuffy from an hour in the morning sun. I flipped down the mirror again as I wound down the window. The light was harsher now, and my skin looked terrible. I remembered why I didn’t like taking calls this early. Fuck it, why didn’t I bring my concealer?



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**ANDY BOREHAM:** I'm a some time writer from the windy depths of Wellington, New Zealand, who is preparing to head to China on a post-graduate adventure.



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## HIGHLY COMMENDED

**Emma Ashmere** *Satellite (of love)*

**THE FARM FARMS** silence, the cry of a crow. Dogs bark in cages, carry worms in their hearts.

On the first hot morning the farmer throws down a rope. He says to pretend it's a snake. His three children watch as he hands me a gun. You'd hate how I shot it, bang, between the eyes.

Every morning I write from my exile in another galaxy. Every day I cook beef and mutton for breakfast, smoko, lunch, smoko and dinner. Every evening I sit with the farmer and his wife in the hum of the generator and congealing silence of their blame. Every second, I listen for the distant blip-blip of your love. Help yourself, the farmer's wife says, waving a hand at the books insulating the walls with thought, word and dream. I take armfuls to read under torch-lit sheets, scanning the pages for our kind of love, trawling the white rivers of space running between black forests of words, finding none.

Last night I saw the three children float along the corridor, a trio of pyjamaed ghosts. They knelt at their parents' bedroom door. Perhaps they'd heard them weeping. Perhaps they were praying for the recently dead fourth. I called them back, but ghosts can't always hear the living.

The farmer's wife no longer gets out of bed. I make the children's breakfast, wash, dress them, walk them down to the school bus. Three times a week I wait for the post & papers van. Nothing for you again, says the postie's wife.



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She shows me the progress of her yellow layette over the puff of her stomach. Apparently she's chosen yellow because she doesn't know if it's a boy or a girl.

Two months. Still nothing from you. No letters. Not one call on the satellite phone. Sometimes I begin to forget you as I mop, clean, vacuum, iron, cook beef and mutton, until I listen to the radio play about a woman who buries her jealous lover in a rockery.

In the evenings now, the farmer drinks on the wired-in verandah. I slip to the amber-coloured creek where the horses bend their necks and corellas shriek in hollow high-rise trees. I think of you in the city, the orange streetlights burnishing your windows, those downstairs clubs where we used to dance, me laughing in the bronzed light of your upstairs flat, you singing on your balcony, me prancing about in your girlfriend's clothes. How she found us. One moment splinters into the next.

The sun is a yolk caught on the tines of trees. An orange cat streaks against my leg. Tomorrow when I shove bones through the wire cages to quiet the dogs, I'll bring some for the cat. Tomorrow I'll play the bushranger and hold up the post & papers van with the farmer's gun and search every corner of it, properly. I'll find sackfuls of your letters, telling me you love me, to hurry back.

This place smells like a hospital, the farmer's wife says. I've been scrubbing at the calcified bathroom tiles for hours. She leans in the door way. Her hair



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is stringy. Her face is grey. She says she wants me to drive her to a CWA meeting.

I can hear you laugh as you read this. You're laughing at my descriptions of the inland sea of forty floral print dresses and forty pairs of doughy arms, at the wooden hall pitching on a sea of dust, at the forty plates of scones, jam and cream. You're laughing because the local priest's wife pities us both and invites us back to the rectory to show us photographs of her sensible daughter who's off seeing the world with her balding new husband, standing in oversized clogs in Amsterdam, posing wonkily in front of the Tower of Pisa, ringing cow bells in Switzerland. I stare down at the world Glad-wrapped to the page.

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No lights in the sky tonight. Only cloud. Three or perhaps four small pyjamaed ghosts watch as I quiet the dogs with bones and steal a car, moving towards you in a capsule of metal, rubber, glass and light. I drive until I reach the ancient rumple of sleeping hills at the city's hem, the dawn-lit windows blinking bright.

There you are on your balcony, posting down letters through the bars. There you are flashing a mirror, sending your luminous messages of love. There you are. Waiting, singing. Safe and free.



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**EMMA ASHMERE's** stories have appeared in *The Age*, *Griffith Review*, *Sleepers Almanac*, *Etchings* and *Mud Map: Australian Women's Experimental Writing*. Her first novel, *The Floating Garden*, will be published by Spinifex Press in 2015.



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## HIGHLY COMMENDED

**Christian Baines** *Silence*

**I'VE SEEN HIM** plenty of times before. Not in my classes, or the Queer Space. But in the refectory, or the bookshop. You don't forget a face like that. One with a sneer that could say anything from 'come and play' to 'one step closer and I'll bash you, faggot.'

The kind of face that sets off a cool shiver, like gentle fingers exploring your back, making every promise to the strange rumble that's rising through your gut. The rumble I feel as I see him standing there, waiting to piss. Does he notice me, as I slip into a stall near the end of the row? Do I care? The last grad ceremony I went to lasted over three hours. There's no way I'm going on that stage and accepting that certificate, cursing my bursting bladder through clenched teeth.

After the flush covers the sound of my zipping up, I notice something weird. The silence. Not that I'm the kind of freak who listens to people peeing of course, but surely I'd hear something? A flush. Running water at a basin around the corner. The creak of the main door. The only sound I hear is the turning lock as I open the stall, and the first thing I see is him, staring at me from the disabled stall at the end of the row.

I nod the silent 'how's it going?' nod you save for public bathrooms and wash my hands. This time, his loud cough breaks through the silence. I'm back looking at him before I know it, unable to take my eyes off that grim



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sneer. The little spark in his blue eyes as they pull nearer, until I can feel the warmth of his body almost touching mine. Except... he hasn't moved an inch.

His fingers slip harmlessly down my throat, teasing me between the buttons of my shirt as he pulls me closer. I reflexively wet my lips as if it could somehow wipe away my nervousness.

Do guys still do this? The masculine scent of him and the warm, inviting taste of his mouth say yes.

Holy. Fuck. Yes.

I push my hand up through his long, greasy hair, bound up like it always is with a cheap hair tie. I open the top button of his shirt, then another, enjoying the flatness of his chest, the fine strands of hair, the toughness of his nipples as I tug on one of them, earning the one thing I thought he'd never give me. A smile.

The main door creaks open and I panic. Where to go? Another stall? How should I know? I've never done this before! But he has. He must have, because he's shoved me inside a stall and locked the door before I can make a sound. We're both perfectly still, barely breathing until the threat passes and silence returns.

I fondle clumsily at his zipper, but he grabs my hands and puts them around his waist, letting me explore him. I savour his scent. His taste. Lapping



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up his energy, letting it warm every part of my insides as I struggle to stay quiet, save one little gasp of excitement, just loud enough to tease the bulge that's taunting me through his jeans...

Mum always said that nice girls don't tell, so I guess nice boys don't either. I'm not sure if, having joined the league of exhibitionist gentleman, we still qualify as 'nice boys', but I'm pretty sure I don't care. All that matters is that we both want more.

After the ceremony, he asks me my name. He never asks about my not having a dick, or how long I've been a man or any of that shit. With him, I'm just Andy. Andy and Matt, keeping each other company for a bit, before the next adventure.

Two weeks it lasts, before he moves to take a place with ANU. PhD in biochemistry. Who knew?

A week after our last time, I get a text. *'Missing you.'*

*'Yeah, you almost did,'* I reply. It's a bit smug. He doesn't answer, and part of me starts to worry if I've just blown off his best attempt at being sweet.

Two hours later, I cave and follow up, *'I'm glad you didn't.'*

The text is waiting when I wake up. *'Take care, you.'*

Those are his last words to me. And the last thing I feel for him, is gratitude.

*'Yeah,'* I whisper, deleting his number. *'You too.'*



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**CHRISTIAN BAINES'** musings on travel, theatre and queer culture have appeared in publications in both Australia and Canada. After two years living, writing and shivering in Toronto, he has recently returned to Sydney, the setting of his first novel, *The Beast Without*, published in 2013.





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