

*Salamanca*

Also by Vivienne Plumb

Edited

*Between These Hills* (1991)

*Sevensome* (1993)

Short Fiction

*The Wife Who Spoke Japanese*

*In Her Sleep* (1993)

Plays

*Love Knots* (1994)

# *Salamanca*

Vivienne Plumb

**HeadworX**  
wellington

*Dedicated to Willie Plumb*

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**i**



*How I Get New Shoes*

When moving  
I'm always losing  
my shoes. Later  
in the spanking new house  
a furrow creases my brow.

9

No espadrilles or gumboots, no thongs  
or patent leather slingbacks, my bare  
feet pace ringmaster  
circles, the trees watching  
me through the dusty windows tapping  
my teeth with  
a wooden pencil and jotting  
shopping lists  
for new shoes.

## *Heaters*

10

I can see into the cockpit  
they are mending the plane  
with a fix-it book  
while they keep playing *When the red red robin  
comes bob bob bobbin along.*  
A hostess shows us the mask:  
a beak, I bite hard on my sweet,  
when we take off there is always a man  
next to me who falls asleep  
watching me read poems.  
I've been cold all year. One by one  
the heaters broke, the last  
exploding in a puff of smoke,  
about to disappear, I kept  
eating my dinner, heaters can  
be so queer.

*Frida's Spell for Strong Hearts*

Take - Frida con imagen del espejo.

Lace: six feet.

Blood down a plughole.

La Muerte.

Frida's razor.

Four embroidered pillowcases.

Seven extra long hair pins.

And the heavy shoes of one fat man.

Give me her heart,

implant it in me,

she had the strength of a thousand.

*Plump Bird*

12

At the theme party  
your moon face  
lights up with excitement.  
Gin helps  
the pellets of laughter  
ricochet from  
our painted lips.

Freckles:  
brown passions on the moon's surface,  
red wine on your breath  
and your lipstick is smeared.

A plump bird bodiced  
into her black lace underwear  
and longing for love  
under the boardwalk.  
And down on the beach  
a dog  
rolls in the stink  
of a dead fish.

And my advice is this,

don't fumble for it,  
take the bull by his horns and somersault  
in a bright, gorgeous arc  
to land yourself on his gleaming back.

*Women Often Dream of Flying*

14

At one o'clock  
she dreams of flying over  
clouds, choppy frozen  
lakes or ploughed blue fields.  
Patterns emerge, rivers,  
valleys and volcanoes.

*Her skull tingles.*

In the distance  
the sun sinks, leaving a bright rind  
on the horizon. The sky  
tumbles down and touches cloud, melting  
into one new chemistry equation.

*She's flying*  
and she thinks she's in love.

She wakes, finds she's  
landed on gorse, a great  
spread of it. This is her life now,  
thorns and the hard yellow of old  
 yolks. This is a type of love.

Rapunzel knew it,  
banished into the waste land  
let down your hair,  
your hair, and learn  
to practise the yogic  
art of sleeping on spikes.

*Deep Creek Advice Bureau*

The bride married herself, so says  
one of the three women who have lived  
in Yellowknife in the Arctic.  
I post a coupon to *Migraine Support*.

16

One of three women who have lived,  
I sleep late and dream of Russia,  
I post a coupon to *Migraine Support*,  
in another dream the bride wears her own ring.

I sleep late and dream of Russia.  
Cleaning out my bag I find a card,  
in another dream the bride wears her own ring,  
it reads *Deep Creek Advice Bureau*.

Cleaning out my bag I find a card,  
I drink Smirnoff and move the furniture,  
it reads *Deep Creek Advice Bureau*,  
I try to watch the bandaid add without switching off.

I drink Smirnoff and move the furniture.  
In Yellowknife in the Arctic  
I watch the bandaid add without switching off,  
the bride married herself someone says.

*Seeds*

Pumpkin yellow moon  
rising and I'm walking  
out the big door  
trying to be a big  
girl here come  
the teeth, sharpened,  
shining in the moon  
rising, my fear  
is the sweat smelling  
high and ringing the arm  
hole of my dress  
and dribbling between  
my breasts, the teeth  
are out greedy fear  
takes a bite, my heart  
is still warm, a soft hot potato  
dusty with white ash  
still on its crisp  
skin the pale flesh popping  
out here come the  
seeds if you bite me  
I'm full of seeds.



**ii**



*Back To Scheveningen*

Down on the front there's no dog shit any more and someone says oh didn't you know from the first of May they're not allowed down here, instead there's booths like little houses for eating and tanning and margaritas advertised in chalk on blackboards and mountains of deck chairs, and behind the booths there are boys and girls kissing with their legs tangled around each other like seaweed, and they've put down wooden boards to walk on, made tiny foot paths and set out boxes of flowers and umbrellas and red plastic tablecloths and there's a place where little kids can ride miniature mechanical cars around as long as they follow the arrows. And I say, whew, what's happened to the sand, it's all booth and no beach, where's the dog shit, I still remember the one I saw outside the pool on a Saturday, curled turd with a tiny flag stuck in it, the dutch do have a sense of humour, and I say, whew, where's the ice and that thick white frost. The dolphin fountain is playing now and there's only one thing still the same and that's

the steel eyed ocean breaking in, cold  
as ice, it remembers me, still no one  
swimming in the North sea. Willie says to me  
the North sea is not well known for its  
famous seaside resorts, and  
I say no, and we stretch our legs up the beach.  
Chinese kids speaking dutch eating salami  
sausage sticks in a broodje, or bun.  
Shut my eyes and remember a winter  
spent at a summer seaside resort  
polystyrene cups crushed in a dark corner  
of the pier, the cold grey water breaking  
around the pylons, I felt scared when  
I watched. The white frost  
covered the sand in dimples. A Southern baby,  
it was all new to me, and I'd walked  
and walked along the shore, thinking about it,  
turning it around and upside down  
until it was mine.

## *Hill Hungry*

Giant puddles. Sometimes the land is  
so flat there are puddles. Scrappy sheep  
standing at the edge, doing what, just  
looking at their reflection I guess.

Where are my hills, I sing in tune  
to the train, traversing this marsh, this  
country of the puddle people, this  
pancake land, waffle patch, koeken country.

We hallucinate, see a hill in  
the distance, maybe a wee bump in  
the distance, or a peak in the fore  
ground, rising, rearing, and we rub our eyes.

*The Guilder Counters*

24

My favourite  
was Jesus,  
red cuts all over his body.  
Little dabs done with a fine brush.  
And the rest of the page gold.

This was the fourteenth museum of Den Haag.  
Museum of old books.

They (the guilder counters)  
are proud. The number  
of museums they have.

Have a hopje  
she said in the sixth.  
Giggling, we fell out the door  
and clattered off to the next.

By the fourteenth, more wise.  
Learnt to be quiet, learnt to stop laughing,  
roaring, and filling up the rooms.

Instead,  
I studied Jesus.

Counted the cuts  
he'd received to his body.  
I wanted to know.

*Dance of Life*

26

The night is young and full  
of secrets, so they say, I hum,  
a spring in my heel at ten o'clock  
down Uranienborgveien to the  
Slottsparken in my trench coat  
and red lipstick. The paths are  
full of oh so many people, I see the  
soldiers in their wooden hut, their fluoro  
red coke machine lit up,  
one soldier leaning from the back  
cigarette smoke wreathing  
his hand, that's where they chat  
the girls whilst on the other side  
they are changing the guard  
horsetail hats on their heads.

At ten o'clock the night is ripe  
and secrets are still fresh,  
my breath barely makes any mist,  
it's not too cold. Before I left  
the terrace, I stood quiet in a room  
full of white organza lace, the sort  
that gives the windows an especially soft  
diffused light across the body and the face.

My left hand lying pressed against a book  
of paintings, one is called  
*The Singers*. Ancient art of joy or  
amateur theatricals, three singers  
with their coal black mouths  
wearing black woollen bathing suits,  
the Holocaust Sisters, singing me on now  
down through the park and deep into the metro  
in the night, the night, with only the horsetail  
hats watching me continue down the hill.

27

The moment comes when a secret held  
for many months becomes a habit,  
an addiction. In the gallery  
full of pale Northern light I dip and swirl  
the Dance of Life, you and I gripped  
in the seizure of this waltz. It doesn't matter  
who we are, we are compelled to two-step down the hill  
journeying in deep sadness with the night  
or blinded by the honest light of day,  
but driven to keep dancing  
even when our shoes begin to pinch.

*Meeting the Famous Woman Writer*

A hexagonal glass  
has been offered to me.

Water is a fuss.  
In this city  
it's piss  
and now cleaned and purified  
it's in my glass.

She comes  
talks rich and dazzles me.

Encouraged to leave,  
I'm wilting in the heat,  
an atheist  
leaving church.

In the Mart  
cold dead meat.  
The woman in front of me  
pays with forged notes.

*Journey to the Centre*

Speak to me in a language  
I cannot understand, I do not want  
to understand anything:  
*akhir cerita itu sedih*  
the end of the story is sad.

29

Full of fear one day, cocky the next,  
the wind sighs and yawns,  
a spider as big as a fifty cent piece  
scuttles across the creamy carpet,  
trouble comes in threes.  
In the bank my spanking new single account  
is delivered and entered into the system.

The agapanthus buds are beautiful  
penis tips, I think about what  
he'll be doing to her now, her lush flesh  
like the advertisement *we are all tomatoes*  
*and must hydrate our skin.*  
I am the owner of only rotten pieces  
of that red fruit, and ignored  
in the bottom of my fridge bin  
they collapse and subside into their own skins.

But I want to be like those unemployed bums  
on the back seat of the bus, drinking and  
smelling and singing at ten in the morning.  
Love: Oh, I wish for some of that and I spoon  
thick brown manuka honey down my sore throat.

30

When I was three I cried at the Odeon  
watching *Journey to the Center of the Earth*,  
a quick trip to the inner core,  
that journey can be so dangerous.  
Where is my medical bandaid?  
I am still looking for my fix-it kit  
while the credits fade.

*I Love Those Photos*

I love those photos I took in '79 in the desert,  
all sky, red sand and dust at sunset.  
And one gum leaf pressed flat in a book,  
curled like a crescent moon  
pink and green. Last night, I dreamt  
I broke it, the smell of eucalyptus  
crumbling in my hand.  
Me making homemade jam, marmalade  
and relish, glowing like fists of jelly  
jewels in clean clear jars.  
And that night we stayed up really late,  
got drunk, and thought we might  
ring up people we hate and  
make funny noises down the phone.  
I laughed, and then we lit the candles again  
on your birthday cake, and you bent forward  
and blew, and then it was black,  
and in the darkness, I just touched you.

*Vanishing Cream*

32

Ill luck and a bad memory  
have forced me to forget  
your face.  
It's the other things  
that stay,  
colour of your shirt,  
shape of your mouth,  
your smell.

Walking past the bread factory,  
I recall this same  
route with you, us together  
on a windy day  
and the bread burnt.

And you, do you do the same.  
Small jerks of the brain,  
the smallest  
most humdrum motions of the day  
can shoot a memory.

All night I rub vanishing cream  
into my face.

*Richard Seddon has turned into a town*

I saw a man on a horse,  
six fur seals,  
the sea, the blue blue sea,  
the Kaikouras wearing their white coats,  
Moby Dick eating a hamburger,  
Richard Seddon has turned into a town  
and my little eye spies the horizon  
smiling as broad as half a cheese rind.  
The fingers of the furs stretched heavenward  
and in return thick ladders of cloud  
descended to the flint coloured shore.

33

My stomach went to  
the top of a road bump  
and never came down.

I spy with my little eye  
knobble kneed red legged gulls  
who keep their eyes on me  
while I eat my croissant.  
The pipes strike up  
army khaki meet girl guide blue  
in an Anzac Memorial on the shore.

We cross a river of white stone,  
a pelt of tussock fur  
keeps the sand hills warm.  
I saw a pony with no rider,  
cows, and a racing ice cream van,  
blurs, it blurs,  
the haybarn is full,  
and we crossed notorious  
North Island railway crossings  
with no harm.  
The macrocarpas pointed: *you, you, you.*  
Worship every Sunday,  
and straight after that the sign reads  
Needless Street.  
Verdantique green pool table fields,  
sulphur yellow scum on the water,  
a pile of dead wood,  
the clouds are outlined in gold,  
- *touched by an angel?* -  
that's only a tee vee show.  
There are lots of houses for sale.  
I guess which one I'll buy,  
bags I the one with the red roof.

## *The Gold*

I call her the Priestess of Bongo. The Priestess of Bongo and her assistant, the Pearl Bongo Empress, and I, travel to Auckland in a red Honda Civic, giving and receiving messages on the Talking Bongo Drums all the way.

35

Driving through the North Island, Ruapehu is the epicentre, says Sue, and she takes photos from our moving vehicle. If New Zealand was India and we were going on a pilgrimage, where would we go? Mrs Duncan doesn't answer, but Sue says that Rotorua fills all scores: sacred, spiritual, healing and full of tacky souvenirs. She begins to talk about tongue and I think of tongue twisters such as *prosthetic processes* and I bite the meaty muscle inside my mouth. You don't see tongue around the way you used to, says Sue.

My mother liked tongue sandwiches but sometimes I got a bristly bit. Have you been earwigging in on us, says Mrs Duncan. Sue says she'll buy a tin of tongue as soon as we hit Auckland. I am still thinking about pilgrimage sites. Cape Reinga? Benneydale? (Bongo and I got lost there once.) But no one is listening. Instead there's a story going

on about Janet Palmer, *really beautiful but bloody down to earth with it*. I think: palmer, palm, Mount of Venus.

36 As we enter Auckland city Sue sees the sign that reads W. M. Tongue. You see we must buy tongue, says Sue. But nobody wants to eat it. *Ten best tax rip offs*, says a man in a cafe. We have arrived.

I am reading in the bookshop with my lucky silver five cent piece in my pocket. Below me in the park boys blindfold each other and lead themselves around in the dark, they do it to themselves. Wuff wuff awdle yawdle whoop whoop roar. The cars go roar. Ding dong the city clock. Everyone has left the park, it's just me and a crumpled B and H packet. There's fibrous hairy stuff fallen off the palm I am under, and a mouldy pale green powder cakes the tree's trunk. Just think of *Golden Evening* I whisper to myself.

They say that *Golden Evening* is Arcadia and that it tells us something about living here and being a New Zealander. Ten Asian students pass me by. Golden, golden, I chant to myself. Gold-en. the crumpled B and H packet is gold-en, but there's hairy bits of palm tree, dogs howling, planes that

sound as if they are scraping the bottom of the sky, crusty mounds of dog faeces, humans carving their initials into the living wood of the giant moreton bay, and the sky tower penile erection and sacred sculpture to casino capitalism (don't eat there says Mrs Duncan).

Its railings and windows are the tower at the edge of the prison yard where we are being watched (by God a lot of people reckon). *Golden Evening*. I try to see it when I open my eyes. *You betcha yer in Auckland lady*, says the golden headed man in satin trousers on the Club door.

37

Silver or copper, I have possessed those, but the preciousness of gold has eluded me. Gold is the one. Remember El Dorado, Raleigh along the Orinoco, the strike on the Clutha, and the pulled gold teeth of Jews in the concentration camps. Gold remains the eternal medium of exchange. It is malleable. It is ductile. There was a golden fleece and a golden calf, you can win golden shears, and desperadoes and hopefuls went on a gold rush and men can pay money and ask a prostitute for a golden shower.

I am climbing down that little hill into the deep trough of the city that has its gold heart secreted

in the warm lights of the banks and shop windows.  
And I am ready. I am waiting for my rush, my fleece,  
my calf, hand me the shears. And I open my arms.  
The birds are flying in formation just like  
Sharpe's painting, and there's a mountain in the  
distance and the sky is tinged with that lonely  
lurid yellow and I open my arms, I open, and I  
embrace this tiny scrap of gold that has been  
tendered to me.

**iii**



## *Goldfish*

My son doesn't go to school  
any more he goes somewhere  
else. He goes out walking alone  
with his hat on his head,  
lies on a bed, where they slip  
a drip to the vein and  
he has his body pumped full.  
*Funny how they grow up*  
says the woman who is the chemist,  
*Is it your only one?*  
*It's harder then, because you've spoilt them*  
*here's your prescription, forty nine dollars.*  
I try to pretend  
she doesn't know a thing, a thing that she's saying.  
Here's a red light outside  
and I have to stop, and everywhere there's children  
a reminder of the way we come  
into the world: birth, growth,  
and end up fat or thin.  
He, my own, was thin before  
the drugs set in and made him fat,  
now he looks like a frog.  
There's a dog on the way home  
so I pat it, sign of the hope  
I have for the future.

When I get in he's on the bed  
I can tell he feels bad, *don't*  
he says. He often says that.  
Or *come here* and he holds my  
hand and there we are, two  
tiny pebbles perched on the edge,  
with the silvery sand far below us.  
*We don't like to use the C-word*  
says one white coat.  
They prefer the ambiguous  
*nodes* to *tumours*, or even  
*bumps* and *lumps*, if you were dumb  
you might think you had mumps.  
In ward one he starts to tell me  
his dream: we are chased  
by a giant goldfish, we reach  
a cellar, we are trapped  
by the goggle eyed fish in a dead  
sea end, and then suddenly  
he is all alone with an enormous  
tome on his lap, the words *medical*  
*dictionary* are embossed on its cover,  
and he opens it, and he begins to read.

*Broken Wings*

Your lips, teeth and tongue  
are sprouting letters  
I can't hear,  
my ears are blind,  
so I've painted my room yellow  
like the custard  
you always refused to eat.

43

Two birds flying  
with broken wings  
we are breaking each other's  
glass dreams. In the library  
we eat thin lentil soup,  
who are these mysterious serious  
people, they don't look like us, the sky  
slashes open, a quick surgical cut.

I try to keep my red eyes  
from the window,  
crane my neck and see him below  
brisk in the street. I'm a wet pulpy  
bag, little mousey oh so quiet,  
the sobbing is quiet  
and now we are two  
birds flying with broken wings.

*Before the Operation*

44

You'll be there in white  
you'll drop into the bottom of nowhere  
when they give you the needle  
I'll hold your hand  
while you flake out.

Forefinger and thumb  
we're that close,  
*moi et vous,*  
(or rather *tu*),  
sometimes so hair's breadth  
we can't breathe.

The body has a terrestrial  
magnetism even when it's unconscious  
but the soul  
is the one to watch,  
possessing wings of its own,  
I'll have to weight your's  
telling you the wonderful things  
about you, yourself, and your life.

*Goodbye (Mabel Howard)*

My finger hurts when I pull  
out the Mabel Howard phone  
card, I daren't stop as one  
pause can make the heartbeats slow.  
On the runway his big iron  
bird, I've walked the full  
way back to the ramp by the  
time it starts to climb I shut  
my eyes and see his knees drawn  
together, the belt clipped  
securely around his waist. Still  
in the dark the shuttle belts  
through all those suburbs. In the  
pale creamy chipboard hotel  
room the doors don't fit, there's  
a drowsied shower nozzle,  
unhelpful incontinent  
hot water jug and I sit  
and flick an Akai remote  
and on the dotted screen there's  
a man sitting in his awful  
hotel room crying. When the screen  
goes black I'm sitting in mine  
crying beautiful tears too.

*Pieces*

46

I'd never dreamt she'd use a saw.  
Had imagined it would be  
big scissors  
or something else  
only fifty percent frightening.  
But straight away,  
quick as a wink, as nursies say,  
she pulled out the saw  
and started  
on my leg.

The plaster split.  
Inside, cocooned,  
my leg  
a bone  
from a horror camp.  
A shank you could throw in soup,  
no other way  
to simmer off the flesh from it.

On the radio (they say)  
a man threw boiling water  
on his baby's legs.  
They had to amputate,  
my hands fly to my ears,  
my heart's in my mouth.

Walking home  
I see skin  
caught halfway on the wire fence:  
whole, fresh, puckered,  
body of an escapee  
glowing  
under the low grey sky.  
Skin of an orange.

*Rat Alley*

Dishwater coloured sky  
in the evening with the Big  
Moon sailing by my window.

48

Living up Rat Alley  
wheaty grass in the summer;  
green mould on the steps by June.

Dog whistles,  
Nirvana *here we are now,*  
*entertain us*  
booming next door.

Last night they howled  
and me in my peppermint stick nightie  
striped prisoner, cried  
alone in the thick chocolate night.

*Mrs Gittoes' Eight Parts*

First sighted  
toiling up Tasman Street.  
Past the Indian Association she pauses,  
puffing on the rise, silhouetted,  
a shopping bag in each hand.

49

She flashes past me  
in the number three bus.  
Two beady eyes  
watch me from the window.

At eight p.m.  
every Tuesday,  
she says giddy to Shirley,  
orders Steak Fried Rice,  
talks about the weather,  
and goes home.  
She eats alone  
in her apricot kitchen.

I watch her secretly.  
She stands  
legs akimbo  
at the open fridge,  
her mouth pushed to the spout  
of a juice-jug.

50

Her secret addiction  
letters posted to herself.

In bed  
her DEKA flannelette nightie  
rides up and winds itself  
around her sausage legs.

In her dreams  
she sees herself.  
A swan.  
White, creamy, curved,  
gliding on water.

Hello Mrs G,  
I say to her.  
And caught,  
halfway through her neat front door,  
she finally answers back.



**iV**



*Darling, N'est-ce pas?*

In the middle  
she switch  
say switch to  
the house gliding  
past the window,  
wobbling  
a little, her finger  
on the switch, she say  
off to you, in the middle  
of the story,  
which was: my story,  
and begins  
with a grandma  
say the green hills sing  
travels on  
to a woman, lonely woman  
lives in a gliding house  
in a gully  
an old gulch, old riverbed.  
My sister say  
that damn gully  
that damn street  
that damn place belong  
to the ones fore us.

I smell it,  
look at those  
damn ghost gums  
with girths like giants.  
Creep on further  
story gets misty  
real life drama  
til the girl's  
had enough  
and she say switch.  
She pressed her  
finger to a button  
what is this  
Alice  
why don't this work.

Doves fly up and into  
her face  
their dainty scalloped  
wings flutter wutter  
against  
her breast.  
The girl tries her best  
gets feathers up her  
nose, culminating  
in a cumulus sneeze  
molecules, particles, every article  
of her life

pick up their swags  
and go fishing  
toodleoo.

*Mamma, Dadda*

58

So my father  
fell into that moment  
that often comes  
when children scream.  
His white anger,  
the veins of it  
always moved quickly.  
He pushed  
straight from the gut.  
Her tiny body  
was thrown up against the wall.

It was like any man  
over all these centuries.

The imprint of her head.  
Left.  
The crack.  
The damage to the plaster.

For years my mother  
pointed to it,  
mercilessly  
pointing her bone  
at that crack,  
reminding him of all his past sins.

What a bitch, I thought.  
But when she was gone  
he cried.  
Mercifully,  
we find we can always cry  
whatever the sin.

*Kissing the Moon*

60

Cheap aftershave  
this autumn  
day's a memory  
of a boy  
who laid  
his long smooth  
hands  
down my dress  
pink snakeskin  
pattern  
laced at the wrist  
lean probing  
fingers  
up my dress  
and a kiss  
while my white  
patent shoe  
slipped  
off, as we went  
under  
diving for a kiss  
went under  
the mechanics of his  
hands.  
Weswam.

For a moment  
life was  
lights out  
and the moon  
and a kiss  
snakeskin pattern  
rippling on my wrist  
like too much booze  
in the afternoon  
or too much talk  
from twelve  
until two.  
You go under,  
it's dark,  
as if the moon  
went under as well.

*The Modern History Exam*

The hall was cavernous,  
eating, eating me up,  
when you walked the length of that Hall  
the echo ate you up.

62

Creeping.  
Creep unto the desks,  
the air in the Hall is still cold in summer,  
the cold air eats you up.

I stood in the corridor  
my legs were red and smarting.  
They weren't supposed to hit girls  
but they still did it on your calves.  
Our hero was Sandie O' Callahan  
she'd turned and broken  
Mr Butler's knife edged ruler  
with her own two hands.

I learnt rules and rulers  
I heard the echo of boots  
in the Assembly Hall,  
and the cold air ate me up,  
ate me kicking and alive.

I was the one caught with the note in my hand  
when Alana Cocks told me to *pass it on*.  
My spectacles glinted in a crack of light,  
a chink in the curtain from the eighty degree  
heat outside, they said *you wrote this, didn't you?*  
*Didn't you, Vivienne?*

I had to scrub graffiti  
off the girls' toilet walls,  
but when the bell rang for class  
and all the others had gone back inside  
I found the scrubbing soothing,  
and have remained very fond  
of graffiti ever since.

I rub my arms, I am shivering.  
She said, *I can't believe you never  
even wrote one page in the exam,  
what did you do for two whole hours?*  
Eighty degrees outside but it was still cold,  
I sat in the Hall and failed Modern History.

*Vic's Dick*

64

Spring in the stacks  
and the librarians leap like lambs,  
I can smell oranges  
deep in the shelves while I search for  
Steinberg's *Sexuality of Christ*  
*in Renaissance Art*, every loincloth is tumescent  
and Lazarus raised himself in more ways than one.

Spring, and the students know, they understand,  
they are hidden in the stacks sucking  
their oranges, that year round jasmine  
of the library; their inky digits  
dig and scrape at the fragrant pockled peel,  
those cannibals eat the flesh and leave the rinds  
in artistic installations from 746 to 800.09.

Outside in the spring wind  
a Japanese man struggles with the door  
of his sunny yellow mitsubishi,  
lovers embrace, and inside in the stacks  
the students are one masticating army  
with their doorstep sandwiches, drawing  
pricks and balls in the art books,  
wanking in the basement,  
they insert crude words

*cum cunt bonk* on the database  
*stupid dick*: the messages  
rise as reborn phoenix  
if you hit buttons sixty nine  
not sixty six. The stacks smell  
of broken shoes, condoms, and gum wrappers,  
articles of used clothing,  
and empty gatorade bottles.

65

A tweedy professor stumbles  
over the white diagonals of Kelburn Parade,  
his hair is eccentric tufts,  
they're koalas, frill-necked lizards,  
side stepping side swiping takahe,  
but behind them the scribbling and swearing  
and innuendo continues, foul Middle English mouths  
that steal the soap, and graffiti in the loos.

The graffiti is curlicued, poetic, bellicose,  
coprologic, occasionally succinct, sometimes religious,  
felt tipped over the back of the loo doors  
and walls it is the scatology of the universe,  
the emptying of the bladder encourages philosophy.  
The students have claimed their own indemnities  
tattooed for the future into the wood:  
*Tutor destruct button* or *they shoot lecturers don't they*  
and on that back desk in MacLaurin  
*Vic has no dick.*

## *Magic Gloves*

Poets have lots of other lives, he says.

*My magic gloves,  
the inner voice.*

66

Intimate things,  
Bill's band-aids on his little fingers,  
my magic gloves lying,  
stretched out to dry  
in the Wellington Public Library.  
Rilke was Rodin's secretary.  
Rodin said, *why don't you go to the zoo.*  
A poem is a process of discovery,  
the hidden meanings of words.  
The disappearance of my gloves.  
There are crooked photos on the wall:  
two women laughing above the  
skeleton of a baby dinosaur.  
He, the tutor, leans also crooked  
against his shiny whiteboard.  
My magic gloves have done a disappearing act,  
my fingers are cold.

He talks about poems as bombs,  
*be careful when tinkering with them,*  
he is also a lawyer.

Draw the shape of a poem:  
sparklers on Guy Fawkes  
flowing whip-lashes of fire  
in the shape of my hand.

*Bill's Last Class*

68

It's like this:  
in the lift  
my stomach has that dropping feeling  
same as back in the room.  
But out in the night, on the street,  
I fly.  
Bon Soir, mes amis.  
I'm sorry but when the night turns pitch  
I must fly,  
gravel spewing up from my heels.

At the cable stop,  
Salamanca,  
the one light shines  
iridescent  
through my red plastic pencil case.

There's the other one going up  
says the man to his child.



*Author's Notes*

pg. 45. Mabel Howard was the first woman Cabinet Minister in New Zealand.

pg. 33. Richard John Seddon was Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1893-1906

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pg. 36. In palmistry 'Mount of Venus' is the name given to the portion of the palm under the base of the thumb and held within the perimeter of the life line.

pg. 36. The watercolour, *Golden Evening, New Zealand*, by Alfred Sharpe (1889) in the Auckland City Art Gallery.



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