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TEXT prose

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Mothwebs, spinners, orange

When the world locks down and winter comes, I find my long black coat is covered in moth larvae, like thick cobwebs.

At first, I think the pale fluff from the old cream coat has shifted to the black, only there's an insidious viral pattern. As I pull the sticky web away, I note the irreparable holes.

I feel momentarily proactive – googling moth-remedies, making a mental action plan to fumigate the wardrobe, wash every item.

Then I give in to the feeling that the world is falling away.

It's the pheromone trappers that send me adrift. Is it really possible to trap a human scent? It seems especially ridiculous in this shutdown world.

I am a keeper of things, real and virtual – worse, I've been overlooking kept things – the moth carnage feels like a punishment.

When restrictions ease, temporarily, I go to the cemetery. I choose a windy day because I love the way wind marks time on my skin.

I stand at your grave and watch the spinning wheel – metallic cellophane, primary colours spinning harder, faster.

As the wind takes hold the wheel propels madly – the bold colours become colourless flashes, silvery white. Looking up, I see the spinners are everywhere, scattered across the cemetery like suburban firecrackers, street crackers from back in the day, sliver-white sparkles flying out of the ground like magic.

I hold up my phone, take a photo.

What are you doing? he says.

It won't turn out, I say. You need a proper camera – you have to set the white balance to tungsten, in settings – it cools the colour temperature in the image. White balance removes unrealistic colour casts – so the things we see as white appear white in the photo.

You alright? he says. *How much longer do you want to stay?*

What is the colour white composed of? I ask.

What do you mean?

Nothing. Literally – what is white made of? Like, what are its constituent parts?

I gesture left and right, then twist my wrist in all directions, pointing to the spinning wheels dotted across section D22 and beyond. *The spinners*, I say.

Later, at home, he says, *When the wind takes hold the wheel is spun so fast, we can't hold the individual colours. It's the rapidity – our eyes can't keep up. They call it the near re-creation of white light.*

It's bullshit, I say. *Like pheromone trappers*, I add, laughing.

That's what they say, he says.

It's not enough, I spit. I'm sick of the sound of your loving voice. What lies between carnivalesque colours and near re-creation? It's a mere pivot, a redirection, virtual spasticity of wind – light – time.

Smother me with your super-spreading droplets. Who cares? I want it, at any cost. I also want you to go away. Movement is white now, an irreparable pockmark in realtime. We can see bright colours in stillness, but they are cellophane. The spinners are becoming metaphorical and I couldn't give less-of-a-fuck what any of it means, anymore. I want life on my skin.

I run the steep footpath, gasping frosty air, sweat prickling across my collarbone and chest. My heels pound the concrete because I'm forgetting the rule about staying light on my toes. Lilly pilly flowers are smashed underfoot, pinky-white like bleeding flesh. Here too, there is a pattern, a smattering geometry. I'm so sick of this inside-out world. I run harder towards the top, where suburbia becomes bushland. I veer left, running full-pelt into the mothweb drizzle, weaving between ironbark gums.

It was only last week – the orange sunset – a Melbourne miracle, winter orange sky – it didn't have to mean a thing.

Orange is a secondary colour, made of red and yellow. In its synthetic form, orange lacks luminosity. *Real* orange stops time.

What? he says.

I didn't say anything, I say. Did I?

I don't buy near-recreation. I don't believe in white balance.

I cover my mouth with my hand. *Tell me orange is still true*, I whisper.

Julia Prendergast's novel, The Earth Does Not Get Fat was published in 2018 (UWA Publishing: Australia). Julia's short stories feature in the most recent edition of Australian Short Stories (Pascoe Publishing). Other stories have been recognised and published: Lightship Anthology 2 (UK), Glimmer Train (US), TEXT (AU) Séan Ó Faoláin Competition (IE), Review of Australian Fiction, Australian Book Review Elizabeth Jolley Prize, Josephine Ulrick Prize (AU). Julia's research has appeared in various publications including: New Writing (UK), TEXT (AU), Testimony Witness Authority: The Politics and Poetics of Experience (UK). Julia is a Senior lecturer in Writing and Literature at Swinburne University, Melbourne. She is the current Chair of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP). Julia is an enthusiastic supporter of interdisciplinary, open and collaborative research practices.