

Independent author

Jordie Albiston

Six black Saturday squares

Biographical note:

Jordie Albiston has published six poetry collections. Two of her books (*Botany Bay document* retitled *Dreaming transportation* and *The hanging of Jean Lee*) have been adapted for music theatre, both enjoying seasons at the Sydney Opera House. Jordie's first collection *Nervous Arcs* (1995) won the Mary Gilmore Award, received runner-up for the Anne Elder Award, and was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Prize. Her fourth collection, *The fall* (2003), was shortlisted for Premier's Prizes in Victoria, NSW and Queensland. Her most recent book, *the sonnet according to 'm'* (2009), won the NSW Premier's Prize. She lives in Melbourne.

1. The Television

The baby is propped in its blue bouncinette gurgling and giggling and watching The Wiggles and when it is snoozing we switch to the 5 o'clock news. Kilmore's ablaze but that's miles away and the heat is horrific and the wind is wild but we will get through this ok. You check the pump for the umpteenth time as I start the salad and ring up your family and mine. Yeah Mum we're fine and Yep what a day and the baby awakes and then there's a spark and you call out Love can you try the tv but the screen is all black and outside is dark and Is that the power? as we both test the lights. And the baby is singing its sorrowful song and Hush little one now don't you cry you're gonna see The Wiggles gonna see Mister Squiggle and all of your friends tomorrow.

2. The Radio

We lunge for the batteries and the local fm is crackling but happening and we lean our ears in for the words. Strange how danger seems so far away. Strange how the newspeople just keep on saying It's ok to stay in your home. You check the switchboard while I listen close and when you return you tell me the worst Yep power's out but that's ok cos we have our mobiles and the front is still miles away. So no love lost no telly tonight and we've had this same curse through storms and the like still something is niggling. Are the buckets all filled? Blankets in bath? Car right way round to drive the best path? And then just in case we pick up the baby and smile in its face. Yes little munchkin. Yes little one. And baby wants to play.

3. The Window

I don't wanna look cos the scene is too loud and this loudness is louder than black. But I fear it is coming and how can this be? And all of a sudden barks start from the dog and sparks and squeals from our new smoke alarms calling through weird summer fog. Yes I fear it is coming but how can it be? This roar of exploding and ten thousand jets screaming right into home and it's here god it's here and who has the baby? And where are you now? I am heaving the too hard the too hard to breathe o my god see the window is melting like clingwrap so lovely it looks like it looks

like a sea! And here we are at the sacrosanct shore.
The place where you meets my me like before.
And love rules the sky evermore.

4. The Floor

You yell to get down and we do we get down and we get
ourselves down on the floor. And the house is floating
on smoke and on black and we are all riding this pyre's
burning back and we are all riding the fire. It's here
god it's here god I love you I love you I love you dear
god it's so fast so loud sudden here. I feel you ease your
arm's weight onto me my mouth full of carpet my
heart in my mouth and one hand on baby and one hand
on dog and the wheezing o god o my god. We lay our-
selves over the baby. Praying our bodies exhale O2 like
the trees. And we sing the baby our last little song:
O ladybird ladybird fly away home / Your house is on
fire and your children are gone / All except one / And
her name is Ann / And she is hid under the baking pan.

5. The Box

His house is her house is their house. This flamebox
is everyone's now. Four walls and a door and a roof
and a floor and a window to see all the trees. Our house
is my house is your house. We dreamed it and built it
we baked each mud brick and I made the leadlights and
you gathered sticks to make into cooking and heat. I
see it all now our small home on fire our bodies on
fire the baby aflame and the dog spinning circles of
smoke and on fire. And my house is your house is our
house of love. Of laughter and life. A good home good
life but it's everyone's now and tomorrow they'll come
the police the brigade the radio saying it's ok to stay
and they'll sift through the debris and whatever is left.
And they'll list our little clan under the heading Death.

6. The Gate

*ah beautiful look! it's so beautiful the rosellas
scarlet! wheeling all round our feet the mountain so
purple at day's defeat the butterflies gold! afluttering
our faces the cool cobalt cloud embracing the red
snow falling the white orchids showing their fragrant
selves soft! to the breeze ah beautiful look! and
I love you I love you the world is a beautiful place!*

*the world a rainbow of dreamings and dreams of every
known colour that you or I ever imagined or dreamed
it could be and now we are winging the indigo sky
and the eye has but blinked and the baby is angel
our fingers tied to its tiny and pink perfect toes and
the green evening flies! us over this Eden through
the good gate straight into the wide arms of heaven*