

Independent author

Maria Zajkowski

The specialist inbetweenery

Biographical note:

Maria Zajkowski is a poet living in Melbourne. She has been publishing her work in Australia, New Zealand, UK and USA for the past 15 years. She has been shortlisted for the Alec Bolton Award, the Newcastle Poetry Prize, the Bridport Prize (UK) and was the winner of the 2011 Josephine Ulrick Poetry Prize.

Thursday

The janitor arrives, looks at me, and says, *you're a mess*. He leans on the stem of his broom and we stare into the distance. I get cleaner just by looking elsewhere. My thinking hat is caught outside in a tree. The janitor says, *reach for it*, and when I do I come back with a bird. It positions itself on my head. The janitor smiles, *it really suits you*. The bird of my thoughts always faces into the wind. It sings when I'm coming up with something. The janitor whistles, and I can't tell if it's me or my bird whistling back, its green feathers are great thoughts. Out by the grape vine we inspect the velvet leaves forming on the vine's arthritic spine. We're thinking biodynamics and plumpness. My bird flies off to be with others. The janitor and I kiss. He is of course a she and we know we are well planted companions.

Friday

After the full moon my garden erupted and was somehow covered in milk. Branches had fallen to the base of their trees and the trees were happier, aiming higher. I had to step carefully through the strangeness. The power lines jangled all day with their messages skittering in and out of the house. Like a message that got lost a giant dog leaned over the fence to stoop down and sniff the top of my head. It snorted a giant snort and a few feathery puffs of smoke came from one of us. As it departed, I heard it grumble, *I'm going to the home country*. By then it was raining lightly, so I stuck out my tongue to catch the atoms. There was no-one around. The street was deserted and wet and I was afraid the dog might be lonely, but it was too late to think about that.

Saturday

The janitor comes by in the morning to pick me up in her convertible. *Get in baby*, she drawls. I lift my skirt to step in. My bones have lengthened in the night and I rest one static lightning bolt hand on the back of her head. *Hold on*, she says, and we're already there. It looks like my house but there's a beach in the yard and a romantic table tilted on the sand. The house, I discover, is actually a castle. The janitor has done well. *Darling*, she says pressing against me. *Darling*, she says again. She shows me to my seat. The tide comes in to cover my toes and hummingbirds place my serviette correctly, one at each corner, their dynamic bodies busy together lifting lids and pouring wine. It's love and lunch and later we finish with sex on the beach. The tide is out by then and the hummingbirds fly off to rest in the shade. The janitor is covered in sand which turns out to be sugar. *How sweet you are*, I say and kiss her until she is free from confection. We sit looking out from the top of the day and she dozes on and off in my arms. The beach dissolves and we're left on a rock of sugar, like two smiling dolls perched on a wedding cake.

Sunday

I sit myself in an orange nasturtium and look out at the ticking garden. Because it is Sunday there is no-one to oversee the time so I thread a ring of minutes and link these into a chain of hours. I think about the janitor. She is visiting her mother in the next town. Sometimes they go to the cemetery for a while to lend themselves to the family gravestones. The janitor might take her tools and do a few repairs. Reminder: I must ask her to prop up the shed. I've been storing my thoughts in there and I want them to last. I'll ask her to wear a helmet so none of them will get into her. Maybe a coat of paint and perhaps even a mezzanine to organise into Good and Bad, or Pointy and Pointless.

Monday

I get offered a job! The cheque's already in the mail. It seems someone heard about my sorting of the hours and has a huge backlog of cataloguing and suchlike. It all gets delivered tomorrow. Working from home will be an advantage. I ring the janitor to say I'm busy, but she is too busy to answer the phone. I clean the house and prepare some space in my notebooks for an eventful Tuesday. I erase all straight lines and empty a few containers. The janitor calls back and says she will do the mezzanine and congratulations on the job. I hold the phone extra close to hear her body stretching and flexing in her uniform. *You need the money*, she says. The fluorescent light above her buzzes. *Turn off the light*, I say. *I can't hear you*. She flicks the switch and then I hear her heart and breath, her toes compressing in her boots. *That's better*. She lets me listen to her fall asleep. It's late after all.

Tuesday

It's dark all day long. The sun doesn't bother to come up. When I woke there were hundreds of boxes stacked on the veranda. I got to work, tallying, carding, drawing plans and pacing them out in metric and imperial. I had to neglect my own timekeeping; I forgot I even had it to do. The job was demanding; the boxes were filled to capacity with minutes, weeks, months and years of unresolved time. This was my calling, I knew. It makes me money. I emptied the boxes and refilled them with the organised data as I went along. I was given only two days to implement my strategy on time resolution. I got delirious. I got delirious and ended up skating between now and then. I opened up a drive-thru time management service and sold t-shirts. One customer came back and back again saying, *As soon as I leave it's no good. Can I park here all night?* I agreed but reminded him the service was closing tomorrow. I was being paid more for the boxes. The boxes, the boxes, the boxes!

Wednesday

It's impossible to close somebody else's loopholes. There are strange animals tracking through my house. This person has squeezed menageries, generations and so much unfinished business into these boxes it's barely possible to compute. But I must,

because this could be the making of a career in genetic time management fundamentals. Ultimately it's a system to be imposed to catch all those meetings that never happened where so many things were never said, to catalogue indecisions and unnoticed fruitings, to store recipes not known but tasted, to close distances unwanted and untravellable, to harvest the inbetweens like those I have grown in the specialist inbetweenery, to catch all the lives lived in one life and to make secret chains out of secret hours with one's own private janitor. Finally, though, the job is done; it's already tomorrow. Here comes my janitor with her mop, her bucket and a few plastic bags to help with the job of tidying up. She smiles and starts to fill her bucket, wringing her cloth knowledgeably. I sit down and remove yesterday from around my shoulders, so she can see what it is that needs to be cleaned.