Walking at a steady pace, I felt the subtle pain of my locket clasp catching on the hair of my chest. I winced slightly, but continued on my walk. I was restless, excited, and could find no outlet for my mania. I climbed to the top of a hill, and settled into the grass, seeking out my notebook, aware of the warm metal against my chest.

The locket was of a fine silver, oval-shaped, with delicate etchings of wildflowers on its surface. Inside was the sepia-toned photograph of a young man. His eyes were full, dark and deep. His head, recently shorn of its hair, was cocked slightly
sideways, inquisitive. He’d been caught, by the camera, as if in a moment of wonderous dreaming.

Mac lived with a girl named Eva, in a big house which swayed on its old cement stilts. Cream coloured timber exterior with dark olive-green awnings: a good, stock-standard Australian home. Inside, there were walls of the purest white, frosted ceilings like an elaborate wedding cake, many water plants growing in jugs, a Turkish rug smelling of goat, and a print of Van Gogh’s sunflowers tacked in a skewwhiff fashion above the kitchen sink. As in every Queensland backyard of a certain age, a huge mango tree draped over the clothesline. At night, bats argued over fruit, soiling the drying towels and napkins below.
It was in this house that these two friends made a home, like eager hares, burrowing into their new-found warren.

Eva had a fascination with all things religious. At thirteen, singing in the church choir, she felt that the Virgin Mary was beside her. She sobbed through her hymns, sure that she, among women, was blessed. She had been Head Girl at her high school. She worried that she’d peaked at seventeen. Longing to be a mother, she dropped out of the Socialist Alliance and started wearing cotton sundresses. Her friends shunned her for ‘betraying the revolution’.

Mac was quick, short-tempered, loving and lithe. He was always on the move, washing the dishes with one hand while using the other to animate whatever exciting tale he was telling. He could hold court like nobody else, and had, despite his slim stature, an air of ultimate authority about him. He had a head of very closely cropped hair, with longer wisps at the back, where his shears couldn’t reach – he did not believe in paying for haircuts – and wore dark greens and yellows with dirty shoes of cracked brown leather. On the weekends, he polished his antique furniture with a torn old cloth.

On our first date, he’d lifted himself up on a horizontal pole, quickly smashing-out pull-ups. I marvelled that his arms were so strong. There he is, I thought, That’s the guy for me. His hair was long then, tied loosely at the nape of his neck.

We are the lucky ones. We get to change side-by-side.
The train swam on past backyards littered and overgrown. I spied compost piles and hammocks, crisp sheets drying on clotheslines with pegs scattered below.

‘Gosh,’ I remarked, ‘I pity the inanimate. I’d give them a bit of my consciousness if I could. I don’t think I’d mind sharing – would I?’

I waited for Mac, thinking that, by this point, he probably knew me better than I knew myself.

‘You’d mind,’ he nodded. ‘You like the idea of splitting up your consciousness, spreading it around, but really it’s like your church. You’re not as selfless as all that.’

Eva looked out the window. Her hair was cut in a rushed, jagged bob. Her eyes were ever-so-slightly wandering, cast outward, like a young goat.
'I think that I'd truly be okay with sacrificing some of my consciousness for someone else,' she said. 'I mean, that's sort of motherhood, I think?'

I was full of childlike excitement. Mac watched me with interest. He'd slipped with ease into my life, both of us eager, to a certain desperate degree, for adventure, love, intelligence. I wanted to talk to him about everything.

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Just how much could I write of you, my boy, before I break trust, before I misremember or embellish? Is it a curse, loving a writer? Of course, I don't ask this of you, so scared am I of your answer. I ask it of a notebook page. Would it be ridiculous to expect a reply?

I've fallen in love with the ridiculous. I want to carve puppets out of soap and wood. My mother is sewing herself a clown costume. I'm in love, and I hope to be forever.

So, then, I suppose I'm already leaning into the ridiculous. Why not lean a little more?

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As the year changed, I felt myself folding inwards. My mornings felt dull and delayed, my joie de vivre seemingly in hibernation. I noted in myself a streak of numbness, mean-spiritedness, which I was eager to kill. For the first time in my
young life, I resisted people’s attempts at friendship, dodged acquaintances in the streets, started fights with Mac. He would look at me with what I’d, for whatever reason, decided was not-quite-enough-love in his gaze and I’d cry. His taxi driver tried to seduce him, and I felt a misguided fury, a deeply irrational jealousy which I held onto with a masochistic, self-pitying fervour.

These things pass, wash over one, usually leaving one refreshed. I prayed to be cleared of my torpor.

I spoke to my mother about my agitated state. She cautioned me, ‘Your dad was like that, he could never just be happy. He always had to have an enemy, always had to be battling something.’

Rarely, no, never, did she speak ill of my dad, aware that he wasn’t around to defend himself.

My mother believed in the afterlife. When a Gone with the Wind statuette fell from a high shelf, she said my dad’s ghost was responsible.

I’d grown to brush his death off with a certain casualness, yet had dreams where I finally hugged him again, as tightly as was possible.

‘Daddy,’ I would cry, ‘I knew that you were coming back, I knew you wouldn’t leave me!’

He would smile, hold onto me. We would be together for a little while.
After a fight with Mac, Eva and I lay on the Turkish rug, both a bit crabby.

‘You know,’ she said, ‘you can tell the two of you are really in love because of the way you talk to each other. You’re awful to one another, and yet you, you’re always here, you don’t leave, so something must be working.’

I turned to her and felt something like horror rise up in me. I snapped at her, regretting it instantly.

‘It could work a hell of a lot better though, couldn’t it.’

She shrugged, lifted herself up, and was gone.

Like a smoker, I went outside, propped the door open with my foot, and devoured an orange. Mac peeked his head around the corner, wary, like a cowboy throwing his hat into the saloon before him, waiting to see if it is shot at. I tried to ignore him and hold onto my grudge, yet I smiled. He too smiled. Eyes all crinkled around the edges, a face completely transformed in joy.
I feel something near my spine set alight when he smiles at me like that. It reminds me of the tale my mum tells about the first time she saw my dad. A spotlight of some sort shone on him. Not sentimental or romantic, almost eerie. A premonition.

She speaks, also, of feeling as if she’s been punched in the shoulder before she hears of the death of a loved one.

What can I say – she’s half Irish. I’m a quarter Irish and can never feel a thing coming.

Well then. Back on our delicate track, clearing the way before us.

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Each day of the winter, walking up the hill to Mac and Eva’s, I passed a great fig tree. In a nook a scarf was hanged, suspended, woollen and of a black and cream check. I would sidle past, eyeing it off, shaking my head. ‘One day,’ I thought,
'I'll take you down from your peg and show you the care you deserve.'

This went on for three months.

On a Sunday, after coffee, I'd had it. Invigorated by a recording I’d found of a bald priestess singing *Danny Boy* by a lighted candle, I stomped down to the great fig, pulled the fraying scarf from its branch, and ran as fast as I could. No one chased me, no one saw me. I had done no wrong and yet sped down the hill, cold wind biting my cheeks, free and happy. I draped the length of wool around my neck and imagined that I was in a café full of poets.

Mac, Eva and I played games in the kitchen, taking turns wearing the scarf. She danced around like a lady in a burlesque, he tied it around his head and pretended he’d suffered a serious yet vaguely comic head-injury.
The gentle yellow light of early morning awoke us, and the linen was crisp against our backs. Mac was always so vulnerable in the morning, as if his defences were donned as clothes in a daily ritual. Not quite ready to wake, and with squinting eyes, he looked across the pillow and took my hand.

‘One day, we will have a massive collection of books. We won’t remember which are yours and which are mine. I’ll have a beautiful collection of silver jewellery! We will live in the country!’

He favoured silver rings and dark green clothes. I favoured gold rings and clothes of pale blue. ‘Oh God,’ I thought, ‘don’t let these only be fancies.’

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Sometimes a whole day is spent in waiting, for nothing in particular. Maybe just for fun, inspiration, a lovely sunset. I lay in bed, recently awoken from an afternoon nap. I picked up a book absentmindedly, trying to ease the pressure on my mind to recall my dreams. Like a shroud of mist, they came back! I welcomed them!

A herd of goats all wandering on a hill. They were featureless, smooth, carved of silky-oak. Wooden friends, making gentle creaking sounds as they flexed their wooden limbs. I watched after them as they trod, and longed to touch their smooth, polished bodies.
I put on a pot of coffee and waited for it to climb to a boil. Small, grey textile fibres clung to the soles of my feet and I cursed them. Be gone, fibres, and stay in your weft.

Not even my little curse could stop the disintegration of my bedsheets, which were old and battered, and so, in spite of it, I smiled.

Mac was away at work. I danced around the house in my broad-brimmed straw hat, pretending I was in Arles, Paris, Charleville – somewhere of poetic significance, in the French countryside. My silver locket swayed as I moved, gliding like a skimmed stone.

Soon, Mac would come home and take off his work clothes. He would throw his bags down, sigh, see me dancing and, reluctantly, join in.

Little wheels spin on and on, forcing us to smile, to make a mess, to eat, tidy the kitchen, and finally, to drift into a beautiful rest.

Lachie Rhodes (b. 1999) is an artist and writer from Brisbane. In his practice – which marries photography with the written word – Rhodes uses a mixture of antiquated and modern processes to build narratives, personal mythologies and contemporary folklores. With a focus on memory and sentimentality, Rhodes considers the fraught role of the contemporary Australian artist.