

ALI JANE SMITH

The walk

Until I walked it every day
I thought this street was blank, brutal.
Now it is mossy with incident.
A lawn patched with purslane, windfall
oranges rolling down a driveway
the small truck that brings the bobcat
the strange matter of the plastic milk containers
suspended upside-down, the painter's scaffold
the bus stop where earlybirds pick up bumpers.
Outside the vet's an unhappy man
holding a jar walks a leashed Labrador.
Demolition, construction, dog turds, it's all go.
A flaneur should have no purpose
and I have several, this is a utilitarian walk
but why not look around anyway?
Through the glass double doors of Julio's Pizza
the staff and customers appear as a tableau
around the orange laminate counter.
On days without clouds, or mist
you can raise your eyes from street level to find
Mt Kembla and wish it unaffected by the
traffic and the footsore trundlers
of shopping carts alighting
from the bus.
Wishing, too, that I had paid
more attention years ago when a visitor
explained how a refrigerator works.
You never know when these things
will be useful as a metaphor or for actual
refrigeration. Some days I have a newsreel
of bloopers from my life running in my head

inescapable replaying of my mistakes
and misunderstandings, my gaffes
and stumbles metaphoric and literal
but today I'm sanguine all the way along the street.
Every petrol station looks clean and home-y
the traffic rolls rather than hurtles
it's a good night for soaking a double
handful of navy beans in the lone
survivor from a nest of pudding basins.
I could think about plates, bowls, pretty saucers
for a long time. Susceptible, on the way to
Tony's Chickens to nostalgia for things
I didn't much care for the first time round
but I've read recently that
nostalgia is adaptive, so, let's reminisce –
a bonfire of lopped branches
and coruscating cardboard
the Catherine wheel nailed to a hardwood
fencepost, spinning and screaming.
Limestone outcrops like faked photographs
of the Loch Ness monster, humping
in contours across the hill, hawthorn
running along lost fence lines.
In old photos the bush
is striped a greenish black but I'm not sure
if the green came from
the aging print or from imagination.
The mind is a silk-satin pillowcase
folded very small. Shiny fibres rubbing
sparking, unfolding into the Goldberg Variations
Disney Princesses, fission, fusion
basketball and flight.