

# IAN GIBBINS

## *Home Maintenance*

### 1.

Fresh with buff and polish, my head on a platter,  
gleamed with Stirling Silver and sapphire inlay;  
hair trimmed to order, as befits the occasion,  
the passing breath, filled with almond essence,  
Zanzibar clove, hints of freshly ground cinnamon  
while foot grip yields, gravel unexpectedly wries.

The pang in the air ought to have dissipated,  
all leaves shed by now. Last week's cream  
should have soured to clot, fermented into  
dissolution. Unconvinced, I vacillate, idle  
amid dog bark and blackbird song, entertain  
fickle illusions of congratulation, applause.

Neck to knee, ankles, wintery tips of toes:  
newly forbidden zones amounting to less and less;  
after hailstorm, imminent car crash, ultimatum,  
the irrelevance of avoiding dissociative crush,  
another private invasion of intimacy,  
an excess of strangeness escapes my reach.

Your filigree caress, my heftless consolation,  
subsumed by blood and bone, opaque saliva,  
the slow coincidence of cloud track, voice mote,  
drifting along vagabond creeks, thoroughfares  
spanned with pollen and bee sting, oblivious  
to countermand, ignoring any order to desist.

### 2.

Out of range, beyond available earshot,  
such danger we ingloriously prepossess:  
power pylons skewed with introversion;

train schedules warped with humiliation  
and disrespect; radioactivity in gift wrap.  
Stillbirth. Mutation. Conjoint paralysis.

Otherwise, “the possibility of preaching,”  
dropped stitches (purl or plain) quietly  
unravelling on industrial vinyl underlay,  
frayed matting beholden to beer spill,  
silverfish, our front door keys engrossed  
with nonchalance, the vicarious contact

between metacarpal and deltoid, triceps,  
biceps, brachioradialis, minimising  
arch collapse, ingrown nails, quicksand,  
pyroclastic flows: “the devil may care,”  
as if fleeting recognition of importunity  
in handcuffs, arrest (a question of necessity),

whole body incarceration (a natural law);  
when “early to bed” invokes nightmares,  
an apology: “It was supposed to be fun,”  
(or else) “the halcyon years” with thousands  
admitted, reclassified, archived in silk,  
regressed to harmonic mean, median,

seeking direction points, left, right,  
the distant southeast, into gusts and flurries,  
exposed haunch (such secretive allure):  
“Believe me, the city is not my scene,”  
merely concrete fatigue, spot weld failure,  
eventually, too many species of borer.

### 3.

Duct tape, fibreglass, polyurethane.

Self-tapping, reversible, rust-free.

Rechargeable. Lithium.

12-gauge, satin finish, weather-proof.

Cross-cut, semaphore.

Shifter, inverter. Zero, zero, zero.

Epoxy. Level, spirit level.

Rapid set. Fast dry. Permanent.

Galvanised, flexible.

Hydraulic, oil-based, non-flammable.

Kerosene, solder.

*Ratsak, Mortein, Roundup.*

#### 4.

Eyeless, legless, buried in detritus

(*Callistemon, Agapanthus, kikuyu*),

I have not missed the persistent attack  
of sledge hammers, cold chisels, arsenic  
swill in the hunt for mythical deposits  
of alluvial gold: quartzite sand and clay  
clog run-offs, fractious misfortune fills  
worn tyre tread. I wonder where the money  
went; the vagaries of global interest rates  
did little to prevent downy mildew,  
cure canker, mitigate crown gall disease.

Undulating lava fields concatenate  
synclines and anticlines. Earth loops hum.

Red lights nullify expediency, amass  
fees for plumbers, electricians, dentists.

We could contemplate unresolved disputes  
over hard rubbish collection and the crude  
domestication of corrugated iron. Instead,  
I stack used bricks and broken pavers,  
disregard multi-lingual battle plans,  
ferret through logarithmic timetables  
for revenge, accommodation, respite.

Bound by cable-ties and triple-strained  
fencing wire, we are stung by searchlights,  
stripped to shadow plays by subliminal  
infra-bass and secretly embossed call-signs.

We know there will be costs, more legalese  
to employ. But we have the testimony of  
the departed: short-tailed bettongs, white-  
plumed honeyeaters, horseshoe bats, froglets,  
jumping spiders, moths. As I sink further  
beyond sight, once the deals are done and  
dusted, only blow flies will find my back.

## 5.

Neither spilt milk nor bare-toothed crocodile  
troubles this blue-moon month of Sundays.  
The barometer is unduly low. "I've had enough."  
Stratocumulus, cumulonimbus, nimbus progressively  
thicken, beetle my brow, push into corners  
of my ribcage, thrum and rumble my lymph nodes.

"Here? Is it here?" A nankeen kestrel, perhaps  
peregrine falcon, desperately lost passenger pigeons,  
evade thunder strikes, face unintended consequences.  
Book ends? No. Recipes? Instructions? No, no.  
An outdated calendar offers unreliable wilderness.  
Far from rush-hour tram stops, our taxi is always late.

Neutral for the moment, I scarcely avert my gaze.  
"It never was your fault," as if rainfall statistics  
deserve additional observation, should skin pale,  
reinforce gridlock. "Please, just go home..."  
We forget about fruit salad, peeled apples  
fester unawares, nectarines simply moulder.

**Ian Gibbins** is a widely published poet, video artist and electronic musician with four collections of poetry, all in collaboration with artists. His video and audio work has featured in gallery exhibitions, public art commissions, performances and international festivals. He previously was a neuroscientist and professor of anatomy. See [www.iangibbins.com.au](http://www.iangibbins.com.au).