

FALL  
OF  
DERWENT

Justy  
and  
Margaret  
Woodward



This score was downloaded on Jan 23, 2026.

Each download of this score reflects the current percentage of Energy in Storage (Hydro Tasmania) in the River Derwent system in Tasmania.

Today, the water level/energy storage capacity of the River Derwent is at 80.7%, releasing 80.7% of this hydrographic score. Each download of this score is unique and is written to be read out loud.

[www.fallofthederwent.net](http://www.fallofthederwent.net)

# Prologue

Let us begin with two rivers  
and a Dad not long for living.

Two daughters, one of this Dad, the other,  
of a tall fellow from the shores of the River  
Derwent.

The daughters set out to feel the water,  
I mean, really feel it. The way that blood  
feels a vein. *Before rushing it.* They walk  
the Derwents from sea to source, first in  
Cumbria with Dad and then Tasmania,  
with the tall-fellow-vein-flowing-river.

In England's Derwent Valley, they glance  
upon the mineral graphite. Find it in  
Wayatinah. Then again on Cape Barren  
Island. Black here. Black there. Bodies  
are marked. Others, transported.  
Two fathers. Two rivers. Two mines.

Then, the small matter of 'Fall'.  
Something black and greasy.  
A *feeling* that (s)mothers them all.

A  
hydrographic  
score

*Anguilla Australis*. The female short-finned eel can lay up to three million eggs but dies soon after doing so. Once fertilised, these tiny spawnings drift with the East Australian Current, metamorphosing mid-ocean from tiny leaf-like larvae into transparent glassy tubes. In a journey of three thousand kilometres, one or two might round the Iron Pot, the Derwent's farthest outpost in the shallows of Storm Bay.

Might draw their juvenile bodies into her brackish waters. Absorb the pigment of her bloodstream. Allow her to feel the touch of their blackening. Allow them to feel her feel.



## WEDNESDAY

The river mouth starts at the end of our street. It's not yet the ocean. But nearly drawn. Already full of bite the way that lampreys bite. Drink the pigment of fresh water.

It's the same water that floods our thin glass skins with salt and swells the dark inside us.

It's the same water that fills his lungs that takes her breath and floods your mouth. Her mouth. River mouth. Black.

*Three weeks at the most.*

Let's smudge the house. Unleash the beast. The door frame at the very least. Remove metal objects before beginning.

Walk down the street. Meet the edge face on. Gather armfuls of velvet weed and sedge. Tie the weed and make it smoke. Swing it gently overhead. Let the door jam breathe it long and hard.

*Purify all participants.*

## THURSDAY

It's just after sunrise on the Alum Cliffs.  
A pacific gull splayed upside down in the pit  
of a broken tree. *Should have taken more care.*

*water darkens everything.*

Spent bullrushes hold their heads in shame.  
The five of us walk on.

## FRIDAY

Here in the North Gut the Derwent's  
mouth is watered down. In the clayflats of  
the harbour, the river's chocolate brown.

To the south another Gut. Then us,  
the breaking water,  
standing on the jawbone facing in.  
Filtered through. Washed out. Gut. Gutting.

Straight ahead a tongue of land  
slips between the guts. We scrape our boots  
and make straight for it. Use our westward  
bearings to steady the head. Leave eyeballs  
fixed on sea. But it's no good. Without  
our sight we soon get lost mid-harbour.

Eviscerate the organs one by one. It's good at least to turn them over. To feel the feel of sac and casing. To squeeze the plumpness of their juicy forms without them bursting. Into our kneading hands.

*One hundred years ago they dumped great slagheaps on the foreshore. Scree-topped terminal moraines that did little to stop the Solway's northwards drifting.*

It's nice to say out loud. Hey, you're a lung and I'm a small intestine. It's nice to be acquainted. To be gut. Gutting the feel.

We walk. In hand the spleen and colon, pulsing. Large intestine trails behind. Fall, using its entire length to extract salt and water, slings it's pulpy flesh around her shoulders. Takes great care to double it over.

Whip snake.

Sessile oaks and ash and rowan. All the body's vital organs. In the hold.

## SATURDAY

It's early summer in the southern hemisphere northern hemisphere. Steps that slap a steady patter. Windermere, Buttermere, Grasmere, Here. This mouth that caresses and curdles. Gulps and girdles.

*In his soft voice not a ripple. Not a quiver.  
To fill two lungs with so much river.*

Eyes that rest with no man no fell. Dad. Foot. Fall. Stick. Lips that kiss and curse. Lips that don't know how to behave. How to quash. A thirst.

All insects and sweet baccy breath.

## SUNDAY

We circumnavigate the pivot in difficult conditions. Allow the fierce southerly to turn our trunks. To drive our hands. Around Fall's silky neck. With all four arms we draw the rasp from Eel Crag's distant scree. Slipping her vertabrate. One by one. Into the Solway Firth.

With salt-stained limbs we turn south. Descend through purple heath into the dark canopy of Beckstones.

*Dad is nowhere to be seen.*

Blinded by his absence, we trail a pitiful scar of ever-decreasing circles. The plantation sucking our insides earthwards. Until we are completely lost in her copse of fallen trees. Horizontal trunks levitate tributaries of shallow roots that for reasons neither of us can fathom, are unable to hold their ground.

Teeth smeared Prussian blue.

## MONDAY

Four still lives.

One: a single white feather snags new growth on a blackberry cane. Two: On the accumulating shoreline of Taroona's swimming beaches, a delicate lilac sea sponge catches handfuls of pebbles in its net. An ocean-dwelling ruminant's fatty membrane. Three: A stone's throw from the lilac vein, on the smooth of a vast eroded granite, an abandoned scene. After the fact. A crab shell, smashed from a height and the velvetine body of a bumble bee. It's banded torso beckons the water as it creeps towards the shore. Four: A river mouth that is not yet an ocean. A good conductor of electricity though a poor conductor of heat.

## TUESDAY

In the upper reaches of the Whinlatter forest we find our souls. Just waiting.

Huge swathes of emerald toffee drip from ageing conifers. An ancient sheepfold. Disused Dam. Underfoot,

the tight grip of articulating gravel might crush a lesser man but it's the traction of attraction that seduces Dad. Leads him upwards to the soul searching canopy. This brazen jewel of Bassenthwaite's man-made water.

Whinlatter. lat.te.win.er. Watch the iron glance take cover in twisting barks and hollows.

*Was there terror?*

We are at one with the night. Become accustomed to the thickening matter of flight. Carbon and air. Feel the conifers standing upright. Rigid backs that almost shatter. Draw us blackwards. Moss-eating-matter.

It's the moss that holds the dew. Holds his sandals his socks his pale white flesh. It's the moss that binds fibrous matter into skin.

We stop for a moment, legs tiring. Allow our bodies to sponge the green into our open mouths into our wanting.

Now she slips her hand into the moss. Extends her fingers to the max. First, her nails then her wrist then the beautiful length of her slender freckled arm disappears.

And suddenly the ravenous field of moss sucks her body whole. Drags it from the surface and swallows it down. Masticates her stupidity.

The moss digs deep, strips the sheets from the bed of Dad's belly. Nets her love in caul fat.

Ties the bundle with veins and roots and belches them up to the surface. Dad takes his finger. Pokes and prods it. Then uses it

to split the skin of the moss's stomach-bubble-thing.

Only pixies and elves live in there, he sniggers. Laughing louder now.

And men who are trees made of larch, I add, pushing him into the fell.

Sleep.

## WEDNESDAY

Squinting, we can just make out two tiny figures posing on Fall's clavicle. Hats tilted westward, sticks and rucksacks dampening in rising spray. Fine black lines that engrave the water down a sizeable force. Making visible the potential of what comes before.

In the hold, British Captain, John Hayes enters the waters of lutruwita (lu-tru-weetah). Navigates his vessel as far up as the Fall. Son of Fletcher Hayes of Tallentire on the River Derwent, he names the water of his father's birth, on the upper reaches of the river. Throws acorns overboard. To ensure a safe and righteous passage.

Thanks to Fall, and the boulders she's amassed, it's impassable from here. The source, thinks Hayes is one tide north. For a smaller vessel it could be reached on the crest. Of one giant wave.

















It's now we hear the squawking of the raucous cockatoos. Alarmed at the invasion of the scene. First we are three and then we are five lunging high on cliffs that fringe the river's neck, soaring above, sweeping down, looking back on Fall's beautiful glimmer. We see her arms descend from Crag and Pulpit Rocks. See her glistening dogwood eel.

*Land spit. Sand spit. Tongue spit. Pride.*

Fall's flush. Brimming with the potential of the find. Smoke rises where there's fire. Fire! That Hayes assures the Empire. *He does not see. Pulls his belt another notch.* Dad's been losing weight. Ever since our stay at Number One, The Ravine, Seldom Seen. Our safe harbour at the end of the Comb Beck Trail. Steady as we go. Steady yourself against the weight. Of the pack. Test your boots on the smooth ascent of tumbling rocks.

## THURSDAY

We are at Dodd Wood. We are at Barf.  
The ospreys fly between us. One side of the  
valley to the other we hover on the eyepiece  
of the telescope. Take aim.

They say there could be as many as three  
hundred. Grapeshot ploughing the crowd  
at Risdon Cove. Take aim.

*Your hair's grown wild. Do the nurses not have  
scissors?*

Not long after Hayes maps the cove and  
names it Risdon, the first massacre of  
Aboriginal peoples bleeds the river.  
Bleeds. The Big River Tribe.

We'd like to pay our respects, we say to  
Fall. Others join us. Tread lightly on  
Moomairremener Territory.

We try to slough off our English settlement  
but it clings to our hollowed-out moss

dwellings with the pluck of eely-mucus.  
Nothing smooths our journey. Not the  
voices. Not the screams. Not our guide who  
welcomes us. Breathes the black breath of  
his people.

## FRIDAY

*It's the one thing that nobody tells you.*

How all these small things. Matter.

## SATURDAY

Cawke and wad.

In the high fells of Borrowdale in the English Lake District, we find a single abundant plume. Grey Knotts. A rich pipe rising hundreds of vertical feet. The black lead here grows in the form of a tree. Roots containing the finest. Branches the poorest. Quality declining as their distance from the pith increases. It's a bloodline tethering hemispheres. A collective consciousness perhaps. A mining of relations.

We nearly stood there, with Dad, atop the excavated plume. But we took the wrong path on Greenup Edge and dropped down

one valley too soon. A hard finger of glacial rock makes it too difficult to retrace our steps. To carry our sandwiches again. Up and over the top.

Instead we sit.  
Unpack our lunch  
in silence. Bask  
in the afternoon sun.

Below the surface, platy crucibles grip hard, fusing ribcage to muscle. A mouth that doesn't know how to speak. How to love.

The way that sons think fathers should.

## SUNDAY

Shepherds mark their sheep with wad to identify their flock. At the nearby monastery of Furness Abbey, learned monks shape sticks of graph-ite from mineral lumps. And writing stones take flight. They illuminate their manuscripts with lines of black and skins of sheepish parchment. Draw their flocks with all God's might. Recording palimpsests by candlelight.

*Making blackness more valuable than gold.*

erected at Borrowdale's mines. Miners are stripped to minimise the daily loss. A few stolen ounces of graphite worth more than a weekly pay.

At Risdon Cove the unrecording of the incident unfolds. The Aborigines are dancing. Or fighting. Or herding kangaroos. Five hundred or more. A coroboree 'inundates' the camp. Mountgarret hails Lieutenant Moore. Calls the troops to arms. 'Shoot the black devils down' he screams.  
*Shoot the black devils down.*

Load the carronade first with powder then with broken bottles. It's coroboree. We are told. No one puts up a fight. Two bodies. Five or six. Fifty at the most. The invaders are unsure. Now nobody knows the tally. As the fragments coalesce. Fuse.

Some say it was a blank. The carronade. That made a massacre. Dad's confused.

## MONDAY

Both men and women steal and smuggle, trading black, hand to hand. The illicit moving of mineral from one skin to another leaves its mark as both colour and commodity. It is here. On the banks of the River Derwent, that the term 'black market' is born. Through the illegal trading of graphite.

Don't be so melodramatic, cries Fall.  
On deaf ears.

This time we check the map, dismiss Sour Milk Gill and the marshy waste of Gillercomb. Rise up instead to Grey Knotts through the Borrowdale Yews. Four trees, two thousand years in the making. The admiration! *And don't they know it.*

snapping

brittle shins. No one picks it up (the  
hunger). No one pokes it. Kicks it. Hugs it.  
Licks it. They just stand and stare down at  
the foot.

All the eyes in the world don't make it  
move. Twelve thousand years ago, the  
ice melts, the sea rises and the waters  
completely surround them.

Let us mark them in the hold, says Fall.  
For debt is debt. Forever excavates the soul,  
(pumps his fist as the miners rally).

## TUESDAY

As we drink the lode of what's been written.  
Imbibe the richness of the given. It's an  
overwhelming flood of thinking-feeling.  
A river of more-than living that swells our  
bladders beyond the hold. An alchemy of  
carbon-slating-buoying-breaking. Lines  
of writing that twitch electrifying nerve.  
Endings on the rise. Shafts of blacklead  
mine our words. Shape our wars. Grease  
our love. A torrent.

With pencil in hand, the Assistant Surveyor,  
scribes the settlement at Risdon Cove.  
Blackness lubricates the hole. And a  
thriving pencil industry develops in  
surrounding towns.

grease and ochre with invasion.

*I feel sick.* Dad returns from another  
radiation therapy

We all do Dad.

Come with me, says Fall. Fell. Falling. We  
stir with tainted skin. As great clouds of  
blacklead cumulus ride the Western Fells.

## WEDNESDAY

On the count of three the crews let rip.  
Discharge their twisting cannons. As blasts  
rise up and bounce the face of rocks that  
hold her girth in place, a ‘peal of thunder’,  
ricochets above the punters heads. Pitting  
skin with blacklead shimmer. Her rumbles  
run like bush fire. Cracking valleys.  
Smoking tarns. Snap. Boom. Clap. Roll.

The gentry come to hear her cry the echo  
of their pounding. Set their ears to breaking  
bones. To hear the sound of every distant  
waterfall. A retort nine valleys in the  
making.

## THURSDAY

'Dad! Watch out! A lance thrust skyward  
from the other shore, overshoots its mark.  
The southern rights are the easiest to kill.  
And float after harpooning. It's 5pm.  
*Spoonfuls of pulverised meat. Early dinner time again.*

Just lies there. Floating on the surface of  
Shag Bay.

He's tired, you say, let him rest. But they  
pick at the moss until the soil falls away.

Fall seems upset, wants Dad's heavy lump  
off her glistening surface. Sets his body in  
a swirl of eddies, furious at Dad's refusal to  
be taken. To hold his boy to love his wife to  
know his son the way a father should. She  
takes Dad's mouth and scrubs it out with  
whale fat soap and water. There's gagging

Fall's the mother of the whole wide world.  
Mother of the children. Of the velvet weed  
and the emerald trees. And she owns it.  
The love. That leaks from every part of him.  
She knows how to wring out every last drop.  
She was the one who put it there after all.  
She was the one who made him feel small.  
Before he squandered it. By lying still.

It's the whalers who set the value of water.  
The value of thirst. The weight of carbon  
in air, of chocolate in shares. And Fall wants  
it all.

'He never had a chance'. I mutter it softly  
into the palms of my hands. In the smell  
of which I still find comfort.

They pin him down for as long as it takes for him to say 'I'm sorry', or 'I've messed up haven't I?' or 'I just want to be alone'. At this admission, the tainting hands now fall, release his words with triumphant jubilation. This is what they want to hear.

'Now', they all bid, 'set the price of our water!'

And with their jubilant screams trailing Dad's guts behind them. They're gone. It's midnight. The bid's been sent to Brisbane. In the darkness of the fall.

## FRIDAY

It's a hot day at Connewarre Bay. We eat biscuits. Drink tea. Take refuge beneath a casuarina tree. We're unsettled. Bad words from the previous day continue to kick and bite us, twisting onto tissue deep inside us.

I put my hand in the dirt, scratch around for something heavy to throw. I want to feel it pull the muscle from my shoulder as I swing it overhead. Be comforted by wheezing air. I want to hear it glide above the water and then PLOP, sense its spiral-sinking destitution through the dead.

*Pick up the shirt. Fold your chest inside. Pull wrists through buttoned cuffs.*

But it's Fall's fingers that are covered in dirt, it's Fall's outstretched hand that takes the credit for the find. It's warm and smooth and purple with chip chip edges on one side. And it's Fall who saturates the debt that's upon us.

When I do mine, it's cutting backgrounds  
of sky but Fall cuts the river, scores line  
after line. Three breaths in. Two out.

I think she's laughing but the sound's  
coming from the rock.

Ha ha ha. Hoo hoo.

Fall calculates her breathing with the  
laughter of the rock and shapes it with the  
incline of her steps. *Hoo hoo hoo. Ha ha.* I can  
keep going for ever like this, she spits.

I snatch back the rock. Finish my turn.  
Then place it on the ground beneath the  
tree. We turn and head for Gould's Lagoon,  
crunching freshly fallen acorns underfoot.  
Walk open tracks and muddy foreshore,  
mirroring the chocolate factory's breeze-  
kissed cooling towers.

Oh how we want to kiss.  
Reaching the wetland oasis by noon.

## SATURDAY

Flood warning. The River Derwent below Meadowbank Dam peaked at 5.90 metres around 11:00 am Friday 15 July and is currently at 4.86 metres and falling. The River Derwent below Meadowbank Dam is expected to fall below the minor flood level (4.10m) Sunday evening.

## SUNDAY

1. Langdale to Rossthwaite. 12 miles. Hard.
2. Honister to Fleetwith Pike. Yes. Hard.
3. Honister. Haystacks. No.
4. Whinlatter to Seat How. Barf. Pudlock Crag. Lords Seat. Yes. Hard.
5. Latrigg. Short walk. Yes. Easy.
6. Thirlmere. Back to Threkeld. Yes. Easy. Scales. Back to Keswick. Yes. Easy.
7. Dodd Wood. Maybe.
8. River banks to Workington harbour. Yes. Easy. Train to Ravenglass. Wet day.
9. Blencathra. No.
10. Thirlmere to Watendlath.  
Boat to Keswick. No.
11. Lorton. Cocker to Cockermouth. Yes. Easy. And bits of river to Workington.
12. Derwent Water. Boat trip. Castle Crag Watendlath. Down to Lodore. Yes. Hardish.

## MONDAY

All night long he makes lists. Things he could have done. Would have done. Should have done. Differently. Orders them on Mohs' scale of mineral hardness. Never bought a diamond in his life.

*Blood money.*

The blackthorn are flowering but Dad's not sure. It could be something else. Pretending.

Pretending? I ask.

*You know. Disguising itself as something that it's not.*

Why would it do that? asks Fall.

Dad, without missing a beat,  
*to trick the other trees.*

## TUESDAY

Brewed as a purgative to treat fluxes in the stomach. The sloe is a berry that ripens and sweetens after the first bite of winter. An astringent that stimulates the metabolism. It's the devil's tree.

Fall, reaching into her pockets, suggests we carve an effigy from her lumps of steel grey lustre. A miniature that you can turn over and over in your hand. I want to rub it up and down on my smooth valley philtrum that runs from nose to mouth. But the impossibility. Of touching it. Without a mark being left from it. Renders it unfit. For such *ornamental 'hapticality'*.

In the 1950's, her Aunty Jean came here to watch the black swans ink the bay where the others built their fires. The bridge, spitting motor vehicles east and west. The gantry, Fall's gatekeeper. And muse.

The evening glistens in the distance, pulling a shimmering theatrical dazzle of a thing upon us. It's after six already and the traffic's still heavy. Wheeling boxes of flesh

and iron into the city.

But if the bridge is all motion. The water's dead still. Liquid graphite. Nothing moves in this mirror-glass of public reserve where flattened pink-green mountains repeat themselves indefinitely.

Not long before we're dodging traffic we spot a lifeless fowl swelling up the river. Half in half out. We tumble down the bank and hover, one after the other above her punctured belly. Her matted edges marrying weed and sedge. A coke bottle in a still of white feathers. *Sloe*. Take another swig of the gin. We take it in turns to run our eyes along the length. Of her dissolving neck. A time cut short when Fall picks up the bird, draws with it, an arc across the sky. Night falls as feathers scatter into tiny fragments of pulsing light.

tone.ner.muck.kel.len.ner – the Black Milky Way.

*Water darkens everything.*

## WEDNESDAY

Fall tastes the malty liquid. Sips the field.  
The insects. Drinks up the soft band of  
belted galloways.

In darker days Dad reared his own. *Those  
were the last beasts I had, he says.*

Averting her eyes so as not to add more  
warmth to his heart-felt combustion, Fall  
creates for herself

a small pool for swimming.

She and Dad settle-in to debate the finer  
points of their respective pints of this  
bucolic ale. He, on Lord's Seat among  
staghorn and larch. She, adrift in fields  
of sheep, plummeting her long fingers  
into Herdwick fleece. Tufts of fibrous  
black wool scratch her skin. Detect its  
composition. Bull Hollow. Dromedary.  
Black Snake Creek.

This is the best day of my life, announces  
Fall, and they both know it can't be beaten.  
They're full of beer and baking sun.

They're the envy of the mosses. The liverworts. The lichens. They drink and talk and smell each others breath. Allow their beer to pick up all the things the greasy river might wash away.

## THURSDAY

We three pause, use their backs  
momentarily, to block the morning sun.  
Large sheets of glassy water peel away from  
the men who fish in silence. Their bodies  
splintering our blindness inch by inch, up  
the valley.

Any luck? calls Fall, veering off the path  
towards them.

One back turns in such a way as to cause no  
grievance to his companion.

*Who maintains his stare on their share of the water.  
A human-leeching-glistening sight-line to the source.*

The man with a face gestures to the water's edge. We follow dutifully. Hang our heads over the eddy. Two black bream in a white plastic bucket. There's just enough space for head to tail spooning but one fish lands perfectly on top of the other. *Feels its whole body being colonised.* A moving bloodwards. Blackwards. There's some twitching, in the muscle at least and what looks to be a whitening of the eye. The men smoke and the circle widens,

*shapes these days in a fanfare of oxygenating daytime telly.*

Fall, now a river. Now a leech. Now a hook on a line on a rod on the arms of a man who walks with the night in a sweat-stained cornflower collar. Black lipped. Tight lipped. Union is strength.

## FRIDAY

It's early-morning and the heat is rising  
between rows of hops that string this neck  
of the river. A low slung body with a million  
threads turning wetland into cobble.

While chocolate executives mitigate risks.  
We negotiate access through the hopfields.  
Just shy of Bushy Park and one hundred  
and fifty years before them, Ebenezer  
Shoobridge erects his Text Kiln. Foretells  
in stones of clotted cream, the capital of  
physical labour and the godly debt of will.

“Union is strength.

In his haste, perhaps, he leaves open the

quotation marks in each of his hand-carved trysts. “Trust in the Lord and do good.

Ebenezer’s mill pond is dead still. His Text Kiln a smooth and hollow crucible emptied out of words that were once cooked and fused. Lines of text. Strings of uppers and lowers. Words that slump and falter as the heat rises.

*“Protect yourself. Take solace when offered.  
Listen for the telephone.*

We walk up-river, watch the past flow towards us. God is love. But it’s the sun that beats us into the ground. Not God. Not debt. Not the night-time hunting with English hounds. It’s the sun that melts the chocolate and threatens to bring the whole bloody thing crashing down.

*Night sweats that feed the monster. Wander her tributaries. All day long.*

## SATURDAY

Blue nylon strings fasten earth to sky.  
Kentdale, Kings, Jungle. Text lump. Text  
slump. Strings of words that meet the  
breath head on. Hops. Sucking sweet acrid  
kisses from the sun. When the rows run out,  
we leave the lines, climb the ridge to Triffits  
Neck. To the west, the hops in single file  
march orderly disruption to the valley. To  
the east, the Derwent snakes and hugs. *Slides.*  
*Gentle. Rapids.* We're all here, lest Fall, who's  
bathing with the river.

## SUNDAY

Helvellyn. Skiddaw. Grasmoor. Blencathra.  
In the lift of these surrounding fells. Thirty  
three standing stones form a circle. An  
axe-making meeting place. For tribes of  
neolithic people.

Fall, drinking up her silky waters, hears the  
grind-grinding, as it ricochets up and down  
the neck. *Round and round the circle.* Blissfully  
seduced by the beauty and the romance  
she grabs with her tongue what the others  
fail to handle. Snakes her body up the hill.  
Draws the spud-rock from the paddock.

At Castlerigg, we set our spines into the  
sun-kissed faces of megalithic circle. To feel  
the touch of that spud-rock seep from skin  
to skin.

## MONDAY

A black jay slits the sky, yet nothing falls.  
Not the coral. Not the kelp. Not the  
stifling overhead.

We listen as she draws a long, lazy arc from  
blackening heart. *Caah-tah-cah-caw*. Making  
visible the scouring grinding fingers of  
distant ice. Gravel in her voice. The black  
jay kisses the back of her beak. There it is  
again. In the morning. Just outside the hut.  
The forest shakes. Then cracks. Then the  
river splits in two.

There are no apparent witnesses. No crime.  
Just a fall and a river. And a forest full of  
leeches. Who see nothing.

*That long slow arc of sound.*

Caah-tah-cah  
-caw.

On the western banks of leeawuleena,  
Aurantiporus pulcherrimus, flame-red  
woody pore fungi, bleeds. Gut-wrenching  
pools of the stuff. Into the upper Derwent.

## TUESDAY

The bridge?

I don't think I was there.

*Yes, you were. You held her in your arms and shook her to death. Right after I opened the tin.*

Dad, I wasn't there.

I wasn't.

*We'd be re-united. Find our way back to the mouth.*

What if I land on a rock or my eyelashes  
get stranded on an overhanging tree?

*I wouldn't leave you in a tree.*

Dad, you'll be dead.

## WEDNESDAY

We owe each other everything.

Debt mutating  
Mute making. Union  
is strength.

We owe each other  
to hold it  
in the mouth.  
To keep it from spilling  
into everything.

## THURSDAY

In this low light it's not clear if the leg is attached to anything. Soft dark fur sweeps the curve of the foot, greying and shortening as it creeps up and around the ankle. And then it's raw to the bone, less the ageing sinews that stick shin to paddock. Long green strands of spring growth fattened by absence only illuminate what's gone. Fall stammers, visibly confronted by the bed of flattened grass.

*Is this how it feels? They wonder.*

No one picks it up. No one pokes it. Kicks it. Hugs it. Licks it. They just stand and stare down at the foot. All the eyes in the world don't make it move. But somebody must have eaten it. Someone digested its flesh. Dad retches. Sweet baccy tar. It lands near the foot but not (thank Christ) on top of it. Like a glacier, his bile sucks up all the tiny pebbles in its wake. This lunge seems to animate the foot but it's only the glacier that moves. Ice retching. We retreat, but softly this time.

Time freezes.

Everything comes to a halt.

*Twelve thousand years ago, the ice melts, the sea rises and the waters completely surround them. lutruwita separates from the mainland and with her moving, five hundred generations of peoples flesh and retch and hug and kick.*

Still the maggots gorge.

## FRIDAY

An echidna in an ants nest.

Tell me. How does it feel. Fall. Fell. Falling.  
English cheddar on wholemeal rye. Mouth  
feel. Better still the golden syrup. Your  
teeth. So little do your mumbles make.  
Caah-tah-cah-caw. So *little*. Does your  
mouth.

*A young miner by the name of Butson is sentenced to fourteen years for stealing, amongst other articles, fifteen pairs of shoes and 1lb of black lead from a shop in St. Agnes. Complexion fair. Head, medium large. Hair, whiskers and visage – reddish, thin and long. A colostomy bag. They have difficulty changing. Poor you. Eyes, hazel. Nose, small. Mouth, small. Chin, medium size. Arrives Hobart on the 16th February 1833 aboard the ship, Circassian.*

## SATURDAY

The skin of the earth is pegged and drawn.  
Fence lines. Hair lines. Cracks that let the  
water in. The middle Derwent's cottage  
hospital. Disturbed by folding-tilting  
stress-relieving movements, we slip through  
microscopic bedding faults. Difficult to  
detect. Let alone recover. Mudrock beds  
that shrink and swell. Clay sheets that weep.  
Embalmed the restless intrusion.

*I don't like the way they slice the stonground bread.*

It's an instability in the shape of Gulliver  
that forces dam management to tether their  
hold. His body unresponsive yet light as a  
feather. Is now the right time to touch him?  
*It's the one thing that nobody tells you.*

The dogwoods howl. Drag our mucus-covered bodies overland. Too late! We hiss and slither up and over, bypass her concrete barrage.

*Did she tell you there's a catheter coming?*

A hunting party gathers. We dig our souls into softening ground, lulled by the slow grind-grinding of dogwood spear on sandstone.

*When did our legs become so thin?*  
Fall fixes her reflection in the mirror.

Fold your chest inside. Pull the blankets overhead. Make a cave over the telly.  
We love you. We love you. We love you.

Dad, recoils, can't tell which is hounds tooth or shattering rib. Which is eel.  
Which is feel.

Run.

## SUNDAY

You put a glass of water on the table.  
You think it's doing nothing.  
But it's always looking  
for a way out.

## MONDAY

We're at the Bowderstone. Named after Balder, the second son of Odin brother of Thor. An immense Borrowdale boulder of porphyritic green-stone tor.

Balder, slain by Loki with a spear of Mistletoe.

A Victorian era attraction, once thought to be the largest free-standing rock in the world, offers visitors a hand shake for good luck. For a small fee, an old lady crawls underneath a hidden hollow and up inside the giant rock. Shares her hand through a hole drilled where the base kisses wet-green lakeside soil. Exchanges her luck for the value of their touch. *For the value of their water.*

We're two hundred years too late, cries Fall. And the damage is done. Dad kicks the cement plug where the hole used to be. Considers the rock's precipitous fall from Castle Crag.

Her 'vertically-hewn walls of naked stone', a 'dangerous trap for novice explorers'.

## TUESDAY

Just past the fish farm near Wayatinah Dam we cross a small wooden road bridge on the river. Downstream a trickle. Upstream bone dry. Not a drop of Fall's moisture. Not a speck of mirror sky. Just a run of smooth round boulders snaking up the valley. *We might have three years, says Dad.* Overhears the nurses in the corridor in the riverbed in the drainage canal.

We edge our way through the scrub on this side of the bed. Clinging onto verticals of tea tree. Flowering leatherwood. The earth's sucked up the river and peeled back her skin. And it's beautiful. *Oh you are beautiful.*

We just want to slip inside. This vacuum of missing water. Strip off our clothes and bake our skin. Against her sun-kissed boulders. Drink up her absence. Let it spill.

## WEDNESDAY

Liapootah. Catagunyah. Repulse. Here.  
Tarraleah. Tungatinah. Wayatinah. Here.  
Fall skips the rhyme. *Picks up each word that  
we did plunder.* To save a language. From  
murdering hounds. *Grey Knotts. Shag Bay.  
Sour Milk Gill.*

The woodstave pipeline is a blistering gland.  
Takes the hooping blood. The excrement  
and urine. Leaks the language from his soul.  
Draws the corset of her breathing.

At the Hydro cutting at Bakers Flume. A  
silvering snake in a concrete trough carries  
us high above Fall's diminishing, violet  
lake-ing, black-breaking. Gut. Arteries of  
absence loom. Just beyond her reach his  
touch. To know how it must feel. To be  
eaten from the inside out. To be washed.  
To be flowed. To be hollowed from the hold.

Aggregates of concrete solidify. The naked slopes and gorges. As we walk we talk. We tend their smooth, taut facets. Pocketfuls of damp moss at the ready.

It's too much for Dad. He's back in his room with the telly. *We'll take him to the sluice, say the nurses.* Flush the elvers loose.

## THURSDAY

Caah-tah-cah-caw.

Caah-tah-cah-caw.

Dad, names his second boy Thor.

He takes me by the hand  
and draws me close.

Don't go, he says,  
I don't know what to do.  
I don't know him  
the way that I know you.

I don't know how to love him.

*Yes you do.*

A greasy mineral seam floods in. *The elvers, draw her river from Storm Bay to leeawuleena. They flush her veins. Her lungs. Her south and north. Guts. Allow their mucus-skinned feelings to live for forty years. Before the urge returns them, once again to the spawning warmth of the Coral Sea.*

There's not much time now Dad, I say.  
Not much time for this delay.  
Soon you won't be able  
to love him at all.

## FRIDAY

This is the larch, the king of trees, harks Fall. Drawing us closer. This is how it speaks. Dances its tip back and forth. A caddisfly before the bite. We crook our necks. Meet the folded tip of the larch head on. But it's the eucalypts that greet us. The larch long gone.

They look exhausted these wretched bleachings in bone-weary crust. We walk between the broken trees, trunks shattered beyond repair. Fall slips ahead. Three breaths in. Out two.

‘Hoo hoo hoo. Ha ha’.

Her upward cooing licks the stones into a frenzy. Unleashes a wave of pure adulation in the parch-parching river bed. Here everyone's dying of thirst.

Do shades of deathless black exist?

Our brittle ankles.

Snap.

Snap.

Snap.

Light the fires. Bleach the floors. Wrap the body in clotted waffle.

## SATURDAY

Dam, catching Fall unawares, tears gutfuls  
of laughter from histories drowned and  
blackened. And spits them hard at Fall.

*The only pinch of fat left wanting.*

## SUNDAY

Fall drives the spike of her stick through the dry lake bed to where it's brown turns black. On her knees carving wedges from the lake. She's a miner in a seam of credit.

She takes her knife and cuts the lode. Cuts the tumour from the earth. This thing a hundred thousand years in the making. *We didn't get it all, they say.* The scale too overwhelming.

She scrapes what she can from the roots that feed the touch of something on his chest wall. Scrambling in sticky black. She kneads this thing into ball after ball. Mixes them with water. Harden quickly. Grape shot of the finest quality.

*It hurts, says Dad. Doesn't it.*

With his next breath, the lake begins to fill with water. Begins to fill her veins, her heart, her lungs. And now her walking ribs are full of juicy marrow.

*The dogwoods howl.*

Fall runs with the pack.

Work and turn. Work. And turn. Until the tumour's hollow. A singing mouth. A pair of lips. A beautiful vessel for blowing.

*Ocarina.*

Pierce the clay with two small holes. Place  
fingertips at the ready.

## MONDAY

The Chimera looks on in disbelief. But it's difficult to see the rupture with waves of fog moving in. It's a white-out. Obliterating all the things that we bring

to make you safe. In your cocoon. Under the blankets with the telly.

We're on a gravel path now, heading up Mount King William. *You're on the edge of Park Fell.* One thousand metres above the lake we're walking on an old sea bed. Five hundred million years of holding. And now, the brachiopods shatter. One by one.

Our tarnished hands.  
On your bed sheets.

## TUESDAY

Sixteen chains south east of Dover Point, a seam of 'splendid' graphite erupts its lode onto the beach. *Suggests the existence of a large body at a depth.* Emerges in three to eight foot stagings.

Out of the land.

The prostate. The colon.

The lung. The bone. The brain

This is truwana.

Black land.

Black snake.

In a quiet four foot coil

Marks the spot

*Black Bobs.*

*Black Snake Creek.*

*Black Sail Pass.*

*Black Snake Road.*

*Blackmans Bay.*  
*Blackwells Gully.*

*Black Beck.*  
*Black Crag.*  
*Blackhall Gully.*

It's not long before we see it.  
No one pokes it. Kicks it.  
Hugs it. Licks it.

*Blackhorse Gully.*  
*Blackstone Point.*  
*Black Bobs Rivulet.*

*Black Hill Creek.*  
*Black Gully Creek.*  
*Black Hill. Blackboys Opening.*

We wade through the spoil dump. Fine grained tailings of quartzite. Black and graphitic slate. A glossary congealing all this blackness into one. Lump. Plug. Place. One catastrophic mineralising event.

*Black Snake Rivulet.*

## WEDNESDAY

Under the Waste Lands Act of 1870, The Tasmanian Blacklead Mining Company get a foothold on Cape Barren Island. In Launceston's Daily Telegraph, they advertise for tenders. To sink a shaft one hundred feet.

*No liability where island waters meet.*

Eight men work the mine. In troublesome water. Ninety eight feet they dig with windlass and buckets. Pull out of truwana a greasy haul of carbonaceous matter. The ocean overwhelms the mine. Time and again with salty water. They send back to the mainland for reinforcements.

*He is no longer able to feed himself.*

Spoons in. Buckets out. Men pick the eyes out of the black-gold seam. Out of our falling-corvid-father-blood-stream. Birds fly. Lambs flee.

A bag of the graphite is sent home to England to test its native value. We try

to call Dad but they say he's no longer speaking.

It's okay. We've seen what we came to see.  
Black snake. In a quiet four foot coil.

It's left to our guide to lead us back. He picks a line across the black. Does not wander. Does not sway. We draw a line that slips and shimmers through piles of abandoned ballast. These men who carry rocks of varying sizes. Peel them from the bowels of their vessels. Between the ankles. The sheets. The wooden seats.

*Just to stay afloat.*

The weight of granites, slates and quartzites.  
Assaying expectation.

We take off our shoes and socks. Wade through the Dover River. Our guide doesn't bother. Brings the brackish water up to his lips and smothers it all over. Turns mid crossing and heads upriver. Five minutes later we reunite. In a grove of native Xanthorrhoea.

## THURSDAY

In leeawuleena, silver-amber slats of sun cut  
morning into lakeside forest. Leatherwood.  
Myrtle. And Sassafras.

Not far from here the fires are raging.  
The air is blackening ochre.

When we spot a hollow in the girth of a  
tree. We beg Fall to climb inside. To fold  
her body tall and thin. Climb in, we jeer.  
Climb in!

With ocarinas drawing breath we place our  
fingers over the holes. Over the hollows  
in every branch. Over the roots. The nuts.  
The fruits. Let our bodies fold into the bark.

We take the telephone. Use it's sound to  
hold what's left of Dad's hand. No one says  
a word. Just glistening metallic lustre. This  
is the touch.

This is the smoke that smothers the forest.  
leeawuleena, the shimmer. This is the feel

before it's felt.

Through the mouthpiece of the clay  
of the whale  
of the yellow eyed mullet.  
We draw the rage through shaft and hold.  
Draw fire to the chimney.  
Flush these veins of eel and oak.

I am the father of thunder, she cries.





*Fall of the Derwent* is a fictionella. The walks came first. One after another. Then came the Fall.

— Justy Phillips and Margaret Woodward.

## NOTES

9 — ‘lat.te.win.er’ – blacklead: Plomley, N.J.B., *A Word-list of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages* (Launceston: N.J.B. Plomley and the State Government of Tasmania, 1976), p.166.

23 — ‘The leaping torrents shall not break nor mar,  
But swell the stillness with the dash and fall  
Of deeps that to each other from afar  
Across the valley call.’:  
Maude E. Williams, The Hills are calling, in *Poems of Lakeland: An Anthology*, compiled by Mrs. Ashley P. Abraham (London & New York: Warne, 1934), p.60.

28 — ‘Shoot the black devils down’: John Pascoe Fawkner, in *John Fawkner’s Reminiscences of Early Hobart Town 1804–1810*, ed. John Currey (Melbourne: The Banks Society, 2007), 23–24.

29 — ‘The illicit wad would turn up in the hostellries and ale-houses of Keswick, creating a thriving black market. (It is thought that this expression derives from the dealing in stolen black lead).’: Ian Tyler, *Seathwaite Wad: and The Mines of the Borrowdale Valley* (Carlisle: Blue Rock Publications, 1995), p.90.

42 — ‘hapticality’: ‘He is asking about a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you. This is modernity’s insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh. This is the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide. This is the feel we might call hapticality’: Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: fugitive planning & black study* (Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), p.98.

43 — ‘tone.ner.muck.kel.len.ner – Black milky way’: Plomley, N.J.B., *A Word-list of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages* (Launceston: N.J.B. Plomley and the State Government of Tasmania, 1976), p.408.

62 — ‘vertically-hewn walls of naked stone are dangerous traps for novice explorers’: Wainwright, A. *Castle Crag 3, The North Western Fells: A Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2005).

74 — ‘Splendid samples of graphite were previously obtained from the claim, and indications point to the existence of a large body at a depth.’: ‘Black Lead Claim’ in the *Launceston Examiner*, Tuesday 15 August 1899, p.2.

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## GA ART SP PROJECT

The commission also includes: *Black Market Symposium* (2017); *Fall, now a river. Now a leech. Now a hook on a line on a rod on the arms of a man who walks with the night in a sweat-stained cornflower collar. Black lipped. Tight lipped. Union is strength* (2016); *A river settles its own cairns underwater* (2016) and *Walking the River(s) Derwent* (2015–16). Documentation of the complete fictionella can be found at [www.fallofthederwent.net](http://www.fallofthederwent.net)

Images on pages 21 – 28 document the Fall of the Derwent, a series of previously impassable rapids on the River Derwent, a short distance upriver from the settlement of New Norfolk, Tasmania. It is the site from which the colonial artist, George Frankland made a delicate drawing of the same name 'FALL OF THE DERWENT'. Later engraved by Thomas Bock and printed by James Ross in *The Hobart Town almanack for the year 1830*.

This unique score is coded by Girmame Ayele.

Printed in Hobart by Focal Printing. Typeset in Requiem Text, a font designed by Hoefler & Co.

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