

FALL  
OF  
THE  
DERWENT

Justy  
Phillips  
and  
Margaret  
Woodward



This score was downloaded on Apr 24, 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.*

Her telltale red-tipped bill bleeds orange  
into the great yellow disk of the sun. All  
these years of life's tethering. Osiris, god  
of the dead, whispers, inside our salty  
breath,

*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.

*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

*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.

*I'll walk into the night, he says. In the shadow of Cross  
Fell. That's how I'll end this creature's body. That has  
kept me from my children. From my wife.*

All insects and sweet baccy breath.

## SUNDAY

We leave Dad in the forest. Beneath  
overcoats of Norwegian Spruce. Make  
instead for Barf. Through hardened belts  
of blueberry and heather.

From the summit of Lord's Seat, four ridges  
radiate. Each forge a stream. North, south,  
east and west, carving the full length of  
Bassenthwaite into view. To the right, the  
Vale of Keswick draws the Derwent out  
of sight.

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 vertabrae. 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.

Then, out of nowhere we hear Dad calling. Legs outstretched, He's relaxing on the brisket of a greying spruce. Fag in one hand. In the other, a crisp packet half-full of tiny berries.

Teeth smeared Prussian blue.

## MONDAY

*I'll wear nothing but a cotton shirt, he says. And we  
all know which one. Sweat stained collar. Oxford blue.  
Worn out but not through.*

Four still lives.

## 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 backwards. 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.

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.

She is unrecognisable.  
I am bereft.

Dad just laughs.

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.

His thin failing legs no match for my rage.  
Spit and sawdust for the night.

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.

Der-went. The way of the oaks. Hayes names the part he cannot see. A father. He will not see. Again.

















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.

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

It makes you thirsty, grief. It's the one thing  
that nobody tells you.

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

dwelling 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.

*'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.'*

## FRIDAY

We spend the morning, Fall and I, moving up and down each other's bodies. Pull threads of nylon shark line from three hundred puncture wounds. Roll them up in tarnished hands. Tie the endings into knots. Newly fraying. All these small things. That matter.

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

How all these small things. Matter.

## SATURDAY

Black. Black lead. Plumbago. The most stable and softest form of mineral carbon on earth. This greasy hydrothermal seam, famous for filling pencils. But also for lubricating car batteries and cannon balls, feels the Derwent's subterranean blackness. An underwater line-drawing machine.

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.

*Someone change the drip bag. Please.*

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.

A hundred years later, as Britain builds her armies to smother the world, the value of plumbago soars.

Black (as we have come to speak her name), is used to line the moulds of cannonballs. Creating rounder, smoother weapons that travel farther. And in a straighter line.

*Making blackness more valuable than gold.*

Theft is rife. As prices soar. And rivers flow. Guard houses made of fell-top stone are

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.*

Remove maggoty hair by salting. Dissolve the darkening air.

## MONDAY

*Marked hands mark the crime, Dad mutters*  
beneath his breath.

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.*

We criss-cross the fell where Black Sal, the  
infamous smuggler, was hunted to death by  
hounds. Look for her bones. We think of  
her. Wretched and terrified. Hunger

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

Later, when the government no longer needs to grease their palms, blackness turns to graphite and the act of writing feeds the mines.

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.

Weapons at the ready, the British fight to re-draw. Re-write history. The Black Line runs from east to west. Their attempt to smother

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

It's 1773. The keeper of the Lodore Inn, buoyed by barge and cannon folly, draws groups of pleasure seekers to the white-crested waves of Derwentwater. French horns at the ready.

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.

and choking. But if there's resistance,  
nobody records it. Fall doesn't stop. And  
the whalers do more than look on. Take his  
clothes and strip him naked. *The smell  
of putrefying blubber*

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.

Jeans and jumpers and polar fleece leave the room with the sweet, earthy scent of the bait. *Oesophagus still burning from the weight of fat and water.*

## 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.

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.
  
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.

*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

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

Two Chinese fishermen sit side by side on the only bench this side of the river. In the distance, Mounts Dromedary, Faulkner and Lloyd draw the land up and out of view.

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.

A river settles its own cairns underwater.

## FRIDAY

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.

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.

Downstream the future rages. Until it’s  
captured by the dam.

*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.

We're half way up the hill when one of us  
sees something. Others don't have eyes for.  
At our feet, a rock-hard-palm-sized-yellow  
gold-spud. A grinding stone.

## 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.

## MONDAY

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 earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.

*I don’t want a funeral. Just burn me. And scatter me from the bridge.*

The bridge?

*The one where we threw my mother. Remember?*

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.*

*You were.*

I wasn’t.

Dad (rising slowly), lifts his head from the pillow. Starts to giggle, infectiously.

*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.

Yes.

WEDNESDAY

We owe each other everything.

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.

*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.*

## FRIDAY

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.  
Embalm the restless intrusion.

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

Throughout the night, a chain gang  
drives steel cables into the water from  
Meadowbank's vast container. It's a valiant  
attempt to stabilise the water.

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.

*Run.*

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.

Dad, it's totally impassable.

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.*

As pressure builds, exposing rivers steepen.  
And tumbling rocks gain traction.  
Turnagain. Thunderbolt. Misery. Here.  
The nomenclature's confusing.

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.

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.*

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'.

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.

Fall, too quick for the powerful container, scrapes most of the laughter from where it lands on the bleached linoleum floor. Mixes it with yet more chemicals and drives it (sniggering) through Dam's stomach.

## SUNDAY

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.

In her pack these hand-made lumps weigh  
heavy. Start to pull her pale white feet into  
the clay. Soon she's walking on her knees.  
And then her hips. In twenty steps it's her  
ribcage that she's riding.

*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.

Around the dinner table, three sticky balls tumble out of Fall's belongings. She makes us touch them. Feel the release of gushing water. She takes the first ball. *Wants to drink up all Dad's pain.* We follow. Push it into the palm of our hand. Add spit. Pinch and squeeze with thumb and forefinger. Until the material starts to behave. The way a man's heart should. Arm-deep in gritty lumps of clay we squeeze until thin walls appear. Crack and almost fall apart. Spit and pull the edge back over.

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

*Ocarina.*

## MONDAY

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.

## TUESDAY

Out of the land.  
The prostate. The colon.  
The lung. The bone. The brain

Black snake.  
In a quiet four foot coil  
Marks the spot

*Black Bobs.*  
*Black Snake Creek.*  
*Black Sail Pass.*

Close to high water mark.  
In 'good working country'.  
Just watches us

*Black Snake Road.*

*Blackmans Bay.*  
*Blackwells Gully.*

As we break left  
Slip between the tea tree  
And wild cattle dung

*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.*

*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 fall-ing-corvid-father-blood-stream. Birds fly. Lambs flee.

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.

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.

*The only pinch of fat left wanting.*

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 fictiōnella. 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 hostelries 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.

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