

OF  
THE  
DERWENT

Phillips  
and  
Margaret  
Woodward



This score was downloaded on Jul 3, 2025.

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.

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.

Fall's all water, mouthing off as the  
seagulls swarm. Giant blocks of concrete-  
shaping neck. Draw her inland from the  
sea. Overhead, a porcelain sky lets slip. A  
torrent of avian flight. Bombs of uric acid  
fall. Frosting the rocks in bright white shite.  
Fall pulls her plump lips. Taut and wide.  
Lets the brackish water break all the way up  
and inside. Then washes us in her saliva  
to smother their excretions.

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.

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.

*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 Norweigian 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.

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.

## 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.*

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.

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.

She is unrecognisable.  
I am bereft.

Dad just laughs.

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

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.

*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

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

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?*

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.

## 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

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.

*An insatiable thirst for sweet water.*

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.*

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.

*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.

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

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

We're at the water, collecting blubber and bone. Eating sandwiches of grated beetroot and soft-boiled egg. Thin rivulets of diluted yolky-beet trickle down each arm as the red-orange mixture draws closer to the mouth.

'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

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*

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.

*Drives the soap bar back and forth.*

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.

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.

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.

*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.

We each have a turn with the hand axe.  
Make fake cutting lines through the air.

Ha ha ha. Hoo hoo.

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.

## 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.
  
5. Latrigg. Short walk. Yes. Easy.
6. Thirlmere. Back to Threkeld. Yes. Easy.  
Scales. Back to Keswick. Yes. Easy.
  
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.



## 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.

Why would it do that? asks Fall.

## 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

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.

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.

Rewards of this day's most loyal affection.

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.

There's a buoyancy in their holding form that renders speechless our small clutch of metallic grey that feels the touch of everything. It's a perfectly balanced see-saw of weight-waiting. *Until it breaks.*

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

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.

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

“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.

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.

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

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

*I don't want a funeral. Just burn me. And scatter me from 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.*

Dad, I wasn't there.

*You were.*

*Well, you'll want to 'go' there too I'd imagine.*

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.*

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.



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.

## SATURDAY

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

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.

*Changing from see-through larvae into glassy tubes  
we absorb the river's greasy pigment. Elvers now, we  
move upriver. Start to blacken. Start to shiver.*

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.

*Run.*

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.

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.*

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.

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.



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.

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.

‘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.

*The only pinch of fat left wanting.*

Tiny cracks split suddenly at first and then  
the penstock opens. Osiris. God of the  
dead. *Embalm our perishing bones.*

## 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.

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.

*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.

This is truwana.  
Black land.

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.*

*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.*

Just stand and stare

In dumb struck awe

down at the wood-lined shaft.

*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 fall-ing-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

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.

Let it rain.







*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 hostelrys 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 *Launceston Examiner*, Tuesday 15 August 1899, p.2.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedicated to Bart and Terry.

With heartfelt appreciation to; Ben and Helen Phillips; Roddy Neithercut; Pippa Dickson, Jodi Newcombe, Jonathan Kimberley, Brendan Walls, Lisa Campbell-Smith, Sarah Jones, Amanda Robson, GASP; Paul Mylecharane, Public Office; Girmame Ayele; Andrew Catchpole, Kate Hickey, Greg Carson, Roger Hills, Paul McNabb, Bob Horne, Hydro Tasmania; Liam Doyle, Telstra; Christine Coughanowr, Derwent Estuary Program; Oliver Ward, Hop Products Australia; Jude Abell, Island Magazine; Cullen Butters, Olivia Grimsdale, Pennicott Wilderness Journeys; Kylie Lau, Mineral Resources Tasmania; Jacinta Jacobson, Focal Printing; puralia meenamatta (Jim Everett), Aaron, Molly and Jolie Everett; Colin Maier, Clare Larman, Wendy Rimon, Brenden Brown, Helen Tyzack, Wendy Morrow, Mr. Plunkett, Gerald Ellis, David and Marie Hearle, David Howell, Bob Shoobridge, Julie Gough, Helen and Tim Tabart, Greg Lehman, Rachel Rose, Mark Wilsdon, Fin McShane, Samara Constable, Joe and Annie Kaczmariski, Antonia Aitken, Meg Walsh, Jeremy and Felix Parker, Gill Ward, Daniel Reid, Simon Reid, Mary Scott, Bill Hart, Ruth Hadlow, Pasqual and Luiz Daos-Kadati, Nadine Kessler, Mish Meijers, Jerry de Gryse, Varcha Sidwell, David McGeown, Yvette Watt, Tony and Lenny Woodward, Janet Stary, Chris Cottrell, and Lucy Bleach; Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*.

This research has been greatly enhanced by LISTmap (Land Information System Tasmania).

*Fall of the Derwent* is a published event commissioned and presented by GASP (Glenorchy Art & Sculpture Park) Tasmania, as part of *Swimmable: Reading the River* 2015–17. [www.gasp.org.au](http://www.gasp.org.au)

## GA SP ART 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.

Published by A Published Event. Hobart, 2016.  
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ISBN 978-0-9953932-0-2

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This project has been assisted through Arts  
Tasmania by the Minister for the Arts; and by the  
Australian Government through the Australia  
Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Supported by



Australian Government

Australia  
Council  
for the Arts



Tasmanian  
Government



The Ian Potter  
Foundation

