

Bird Death

An upturned bird on the cobblestones in the alleyway behind my office today, a small pigeon. Its head was flattened and dishevelled, and there was a gaping red hole in its underside, like it'd been disembowelled by another bird. Why is it so affecting to see dead birds? They die all the time – I just don't happen to see them. It must be the feet sticking up, a clear sign that this feathered being is no longer where it belongs.

Last Sunday a bird flew into one of the back yard windows, hard, and lay on its back in the grass. I was sitting facing the yard when I heard the thud, to the right and above my head. I could see its heart pumping in its chest, through its feet which were slightly bent. Not knowing what to do, I called out to Mel, who was on the phone in her room. I was a little panicked. What was I supposed to do, hold it and bring it inside? Its heart was beating so fast under its humped fur. Mel picked it up in a blanket and held it, sitting on the back steps. We sat there for a few minutes. 'They usually fly away,' she said. Its heart stopped beating as she held it. We both looked at it for a while. I buried it under one of the heavy pot plants, one with an orange flower, so that the dog wouldn't dig it up.

Prithvi Varatharajan

Bushfires and Driza-bones

In 2009 one of my Australian literature teachers commented on the Black Saturday bushfires around Kinglake and Marysville in Victoria: 'If I see one more reporter wearing a Driza-Bone and Akubra hat, I'm going to smash the TV,' she said. I'm making up the last part, about what she'd do, as I can't remember it. But I clearly remember thinking, having realised that she was making a comment on national mythography in media: 'you're very sensitive to symbolism.' My reaction would have been to pull my shoulders back and look startled. I always have that look when someone sheds light on something I hadn't seen properly, or not in that particular way.

Prithvi Varatharajan

Floods in Chennai

A phone call from Adelaide as I'm buying cherries and peaches after a swim. 'Do you know that there have been floods in Chennai?' I check the news: the city has no electricity and the phone lines are down; the military is evacuating people. 'Your grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins are apparently fine – your uncle in the US has managed to get hold of them somehow, even though the phone lines don't work.' Are our family there able to contact each other? 'No.'

I check the news again and get stuck on the visual and formal language: 'The country's Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, told parliament: "Chennai has become a small island. This is unprecedented".'/'"The government will stand by the people of Tamil Nadu in their hour of need," [Prime Minister] Modi told reporters.' I've recommenced learning to read and speak Tamil from mum by Skype, once a week. Hopefully this will mitigate my complete lack of communication with my extended family, who are, in this moment, physically unable to communicate with each other.

Prithvi Varatharajan