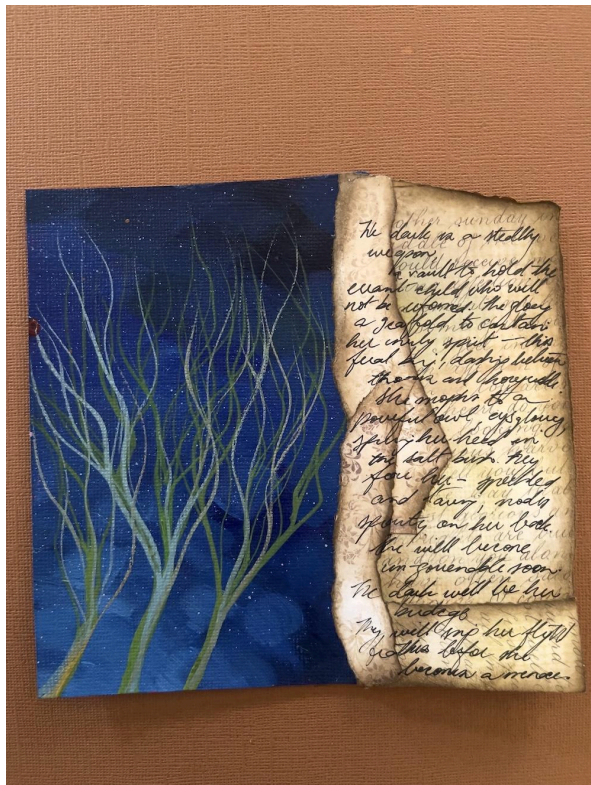


## The Ourimbah meditations



I

The dark is a stealthy weapon,  
a vault to hold the errant child  
who will not be reformed.  
The gloaming, a scaffold  
for her unruly spirit—  
feral being, dashing  
between thorns and honeysuckle.  
She morphs to a powerful owl,  
eyes glowering, spinning her head  
in the salt bush. They fear her—  
speckled, tawny, nodes  
sprouting on her back.  
She will become un-governable soon.  
The dark will be her birdcage.  
They will snip her flight feathers  
before she becomes  
a menace.



## II

The dark churns like an ocean.  
She flints the tar in her metal armour.  
Amber studs glow like sabers  
on the ribbon of ash.  
She sees reams of time,  
the past glitching in the rear-view mirror,  
objects of obsession folded,  
blacked out, forgotten.  
The splash of headlight illuminates  
but three seconds of the future.  
The dark speaks in whispers  
fading to lullabies,  
air thinning, opening  
to another world.



### III

Alone, on this winding road,  
she is not afraid anymore  
of the bunya pines  
shrouded in tourmaline ink.  
She weaves from arterial roads  
to the broken vein of the motorway.  
The bitumen wears its night skin  
like a taxidermist's prize.  
Coastal swampoaks sway  
in the margins. Mile markers brood,  
gargoyles over sandstone,  
plateaus pleating shawls  
of fern and sunburnt lichen.  
The artificial eye of the high beam  
grows ominous by the minute.  
She remembers the birdcage—  
the tremor of her heart  
pressed against iron bars.



#### IV

The dark rustles with hidden denizens—  
the hitchhiker betrayed  
by the garbled compass.  
Circling the dense bushland  
the ghost of a killer prowls  
on unpatrolled borders.  
The bush drums up dust,  
shivering silhouettes  
of imagined beings.  
Who haunts the night?  
Spirits rising from the pages  
of campfire stories follow her  
in dizzy constellations—  
orbs of weaving light,  
the mind playing its cruel games,  
strange pursuit on this lone highway,  
past and present spinning  
in dream mandalas.





V

How many ghosts ride  
on her leather tonight?  
Nothing touches her—  
no grey fingers on her neck,  
nothing to fear of those  
done with the rigours of living.  
In the heart of the cemetery,  
all she felt was the quiet of the earth—  
wet moss over slumber.  
She has feared the living though—  
no ghost ever mauled her body.  
The road is an exercise  
in silence. She remembers  
those who pockmarked her spirit,  
mirrors blooming in fluorescent light  
with the memory of betrayals.



## VI

A moon harangued by thunder clouds.  
She recalls its light,  
scattered over sacred figs,  
over lattices of pepper vines,  
how they said the moon would wake  
the sleeping beast,  
raise it from the netherworlds,  
jaws glinting in the beams.  
She would cower and wait  
for it to fall upon her flesh. Yet,  
no such monster ever came  
except in the undergrowth  
of her mind. All that lingers here,  
is blue fog and rolling hills, laced  
with silver banksia. She imagines  
a woman in white from the lore  
of the ancient bridge,  
but it is just a flock of cockatoos  
stirring in the night.



## VII

Merge and blend—the patchwork  
of sclerophyll forests  
and eucalyptus bark, singing  
of a time long gone.  
The dark has now become her friend—  
she tethers her body and rises up  
outside her mortal outline.  
She follows her metal carapace  
as it races on the asphalt.  
Death of the golden hour—night  
grey and black, storm clouds  
suffocating the stars. She crosses  
from twilight to lands beyond  
the seam of the wild bush,  
body fading to an estuary of green,  
Country entering her lungs,  
breathing in sync.





### VIII

At Hawksbury, the dark stirs again,  
spider-silk undulating with the sheen  
of an Andalusian horse.  
She wonders what it is like  
to be reborn as a midnight foal  
among the sandstone cliffs.  
Wild mares dot the valley face,  
spirit storytellers rise  
on the edges of hoary creeks,  
walking the narrow gullies at night.  
Plumes of mist surround  
the land of the living.





## IX

The colony of urban ants—  
bumper to bumper  
on the long satin of grey.  
The rumble of rubber burns the flowers  
that creep onto the boundaries,  
what was once claimed, held  
in tight fists. The concrete muffles  
the cries of erased beings.  
City lights on the horizon's brow  
blink and beckon.  
Somewhere, in the urban mesh,  
home is within reach.



X

It is close to the nest that the guard  
slips—the danger of relief.  
Home-stretch. Hazard looms,  
exits fall like dominoes on the hum  
of familiar roads. Sleep stings  
her waterline with rock salt.  
Knuckles of lamps race past  
in a disorienting daze.  
Twenty minutes away, three souls wait,  
watching her in arrow form, pulsing  
on a bright blue app. She moves  
one pixel at a time, each dotted beat  
a flight through air and water.  
The heavens open again  
onto the windshield. She has come  
this far, over ash and tar.  
Love will lead her home.

