

Colour My World

Mairi Neil

Martin's tongue, a pink dot of concentration, protruded between thin lips. His eyes danced from paint palette to easel.

Just like his father, Elaine thought, as she watched Martin dab and daub, sweep and slide. The paintbrush looking too big for six-year-old hands. The square of butcher's paper soon filled with colourful blobs and strokes. 'Jackson Pollock eat your heart out,' Elaine whispered, and smiled at Martin's effort for the school art competition.

She remembered Tom's pride at the birth of their son. 'Hope he has my talent for painting and your way with words.'

Tears stung. The car accident had robbed her of Tom and left Martin severely disabled. Thank goodness she had discovered this school and new therapies. Martin had spoken his first word yesterday and if he can hold a paintbrush, a pen will follow.

Revenge is Sweet

Mairi Neil

'I'm not staying in this dump for a whole week.' Gina stared at Bob's flushed face and flinched as he slammed the wardrobe door. 'I told you last night your tricks don't work with me.'

She watched her fiancé cram clothes into his holdall. 'What tricks?' Her voice remained calm. 'Pardon me for thinking you'd enjoy being alone with me. Just the two of us. Undisturbed.'

Bob snorted and waved his arms at the window. 'A bloody owl hooting all night, frogs croaking, and a twittering cacophony at dawn. Give me a noisy resort any day.'

'Well, I'm not leaving the cabin.'

'Fine! I'll come back for you in a week.'

And he was gone.

Gina went to the woodpile with her coffee and sat on the tarpaulin covering the Holden's spare wheel.

She soaked up the sun, smiled, and checked her watch. The tyre would be flat when he reached Kangaroo Gully.

She'll prepare his favourite lunch soon. The forty minute walk uphill good sauce for Bob's appetite.

Fear of the Dark

Mairi Neil

A beep like a balloon popping confirms the Mazda has locked. I hurry towards the lift. Is that other footsteps, or the echo of mine? The few yards seem to double. Why are the lights flickering?

I shiver. The agent boasted the car park's electronic gates made it 'as safe as houses'. I hold my breath. Listen. The lights flicker off.

I freeze. What if I trip? Bump into a parked car? The shadows of the concrete pillars, plumbing and air-conditioning pipes crisscrossing the ceiling and oil stains on the concrete morph into scary shapes. The electric generator crackles but was that a metallic click as if someone dropped a key?

My bladder throbs. Legs quiver. A scream gathers in my throat. The lights flicker on and elevator doors shine like a beacon.

I stumble on a raised edge of concrete. Hands flail but I don't fall. Laughing at my clumsiness I reach the lift just as the lights die with a bang. The lift doors refuse to open. I breathe deeply — and inhale the acrid smell of cigarette smoke.

My voice a whimper, 'Who's there?'

A Fond Farewell

Mairi Neil

The slow procession winds past the white coffin, people paying silent respect in their own way.

I watch Brian touch his lips with the tips of his fingers of his right hand, then transfer the kiss by brushing the side of the coffin. His electric blue eyes glittering unshed tears.

He takes the candle from a black-suited attendant to press into the sandbox. The flame from the taper wavers and dances as Brian's shaking hand tries to light the wick.

I gently grasp his trembling hand and guide it towards the candle; can almost hear his beating heart in short shallow breaths.

I ache for him, for the grief he must keep hidden and look around the chapel at the bowed heads and sombre expressions of the other mourners. How many know of his secret marriage to Mark?