Mango

eight years old
walking under the bridge
scrub, swamp
abandoned machinery
insides of tennis balls
bits of fences
meeting the boys
at the dam
bikes in a pile
skater shoe soles
not cold in
never is
boys talking about mangoes
slapping water
some have never had one
listen to the taste
the squeeze of a cheek
dripping chins
a dog jumps in
they pull on tufts of hair
fill ears with mud
breeze full
clouds break
they remember my birthday
is tomorrow

Ellen van Neerven
Drifters

One day soon he’ll tell her it’s time to start packing
and the kids will yell ‘Truly?’ and get wildly excited for no reason
and the brown kelpie pup will start dashing about, tripping everyone up
and she’ll go out to the vegetable-patch and pick all the green tomatoes from the vines
and notice how the oldest girl is close to tears because she was happy here,
and how the youngest girl is beaming because she wasn’t.
And the first thing she’ll put on the trailer will be the bottling-set she never unpacked from
Grovedale,
and when the loaded ute bumps down the drive past the blackberry canes with their last
shrivelled fruit,
she won’t even ask why they’re leaving this time, or where they’re headed for
she’ll only remember how, when they came here
she held out her hands, bright with berries,
the first of the season, and said:
‘Make a wish, Tom, make a wish.’

Bruce Dawe
Homecoming

All day, day after day, they’re bringing them home,
they’re picking them up, those they can find, and bringing them home,
they’re bringing them in, piled on the hulls of Grants, in trucks, in convoys,
they’re zipping them up in green plastic bags,
they’re tagging them now in Saigon, in the mortuary coolness
they’re giving them names, they’re rolling them out of
the deep-freeze lockers — on the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut
the noble jets are whining like hounds,
they are bringing them home
– curly heads, kinky-hairs, crew-cuts, balding non-coms
– they’re high, now, high and higher, over the land, the steaming chow mein,
their shadows are tracing the blue curve of the Pacific
with sorrowful quick fingers, heading south, heading east,
home, home, home — and the coasts swing upward, the old ridiculous curvatures
of earth, the knuckled hills, the mangrove-swamps, the desert emptiness...
in their sterile housing they tilt towards these like skiers
– taxiing in, on the long runways, the howl of their homecoming rises
surrounding them like their last moments (the mash, the splendour)
then fading at length as they move
on to small towns where dogs in the frozen sunset
raise muzzles in mute salute,
and on to cities in whose wide web of suburbs
telegrams tremble like leaves from a wintering tree
and the spider grief swings in his bitter geometry
– they’re bringing them home, now, too late, too early.
The Surfer

He thrust his joy against the weight of the sea;
climbed through, slid under those long banks of foam--
(hawthorn hedges in spring, thorns in the face stinging).
How his brown strength drove through the hollow and coil
of green-through weirs of water!
Muscle of arm thrust down long muscle of water;
and swimming so, went out of sight
where mortal, masterful, frail, the gulls went wheeling
in air as he in water, with delight.

Turn home, the sun goes down; swimmer, turn home.
Last leaf of gold vanishes from the sea-curve.
Take the big roller’s shoulder, speed and serve;
come to the long beach home like a gull diving.

For on the sand the grey-wolf sea lies, snarling,
cold twilight wind splits the waves’ hair and shows
the bones they worry in their wolf-teeth. O, wind blows
and sea crouches on sand, fawning and mouthing;
drops there and snatches again, drops and again snatches
its broken toys, its whitened pebbles and shells.

Judith Wright
In The Park

She sits in the park. Her clothes are out of date.
Two children whine and bicker, tug her skirt.
A third draws aimless patterns in the dirt
Someone she loved once passed by – too late
to feign indifference to that casual nod.
From his neat head unquestionably rises
a small balloon...”but for the grace of God...”

They stand a while in flickering light, rehearsing
the children’s names and birthdays. “It’s so sweet
to hear their chatter, watch them grow and thrive,”
she says to his departing smile. Then, nursing
the youngest child, sits staring at her feet.
To the wind she says, “They have eaten me alive.”

Gwen Harwood
An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow

The word goes round Repins,
the murmur goes round Lorenzinis,
at Tattersalls, men look up from sheets of numbers,
the Stock Exchange scribblers forget the chalk in their hands
and men with bread in their pockets leave the Greek Club:
There's a fellow crying in Martin Place. They can't stop him.

The traffic in George Street is banked up for half a mile
and drained of motion. The crowds are edgy with talk
and more crowds come hurrying. Many run in the back streets
which minutes ago were busy main streets, pointing:
There's a fellow weeping down there. No one can stop him.

The man we surround, the man no one approaches
simply weeps, and does not cover it, weeps
not like a child, not like the wind, like a man
and does not declaim it, nor beat his breast, nor even
sob very loudly - yet the dignity of his weeping
holds us back from his space, the hollow he makes about him
in the midday light, in his pentagram of sorrow,
and uniforms back in the crowd who tried to seize him
stare out at him, and feel, with amazement, their minds
longing for tears as children for a rainbow.

Some will say, in the years to come, a halo
or force stood around him. There is no such thing.
Some will say they were shocked and would have stopped him
but they will not have been there. The fiercest manhood,
the toughest reserve, the slickest wit amongst us
trembles with silence, and burns with unexpected
judgements of peace. Some in the concourse scream
who thought themselves happy. Only the smallest children
and such as look out of Paradise come near him
and sit at his feet, with dogs and dusty pigeons.

Ridiculous, says a man near me, and stops
his mouth with his hands, as if it uttered vomit -
and I see a woman, shining, stretch her hand
and shake as she receives the gift of weeping;
as many as follow her also receive it

and many weep for sheer acceptance, and more
refuse to weep for fear of all acceptance,
but the weeping man, like the earth, requires nothing,
the man who weeps ignores us, and cries out
of his writhen face and ordinary body

not words, but grief, not messages, but sorrow,
hard as the earth, sheer, present as the sea -
and when he stops, he simply walks between us
mopping his face with the dignity of one
man who has wept, and now has finished weeping.

Evading believers, he hurries off down Pitt Street.

Les Murray
Rainwater Tank

Empty rings when tapped give tongue, rings that are tense with water talk: as he sounds them, ring by rung, Joe Mitchell's reddened knuckles walk.

The cattledog's head sinks down a notch and another notch, beside the tank, and Mitchell's boy, with an old jack-plane lifts moustaches from a plank.

From the puddle that the tank has dripped hens peck glimmerings and uptilt their heads to shape the quickness down; petunias live on what gets spilt.

The tankstand spider adds a spittle thread to her portrait of her soul. Pencil-gray and stacked like shillings out of a banker's paper roll

stands the tank, roof-water drinker. The downpipe stares drought into it. Briefly the kitchen tap turns on then off. But the tank says, Debit, Debit.

Les Murray
All One Race

Black tribe, yellow tribe, red, white or brown,
From where the sun jumps up to where it goes down,
Herrs and pukka-sahibs, demoiselles and squaws,
All one family, so why make wars?
They’re not interested in brumby runs,
We don’t hanker after Midnight Suns;
I’m for all humankind, not colour gibes;
I’m international, and never mind tribes.

Black, white or brown race, yellow race or red,
From the torrid equator to the ice-fields spread,
Monsieurs and senors, lubras and fraus,
All one family, so why family rows?
We’re not interested in their igloos,
They’re not mad about kangaroos;
I’m international, never mind place;
I’m for humanity, all one race.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal
Son of Mine

To Denis

My son, your troubled eyes search mine,
Puzzled and hurt by colour line.
Your black skin as soft as velvet shine;
What can I tell you, son of mine?

I could tell you of heartbreak, hatred blind,
I could tell you of crimes that shame mankind,
Of brutal wrong and deeds malign,
Of rape and murder, son of mine;

But I'll tell you instead of brave and fine
When lives of black and white entwine,
And men in brotherhood combine-
This would I tell you, son of mine.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal
We are Going

They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of the estate agent reads: 'Rubbish May Be Tipped Here'.
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
'We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fires.

We are the lightening bolt over Gaphembah Hill
Quick and terrible,
And the Thunderer after him, that loud fellow.
We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
We are nature and the past, all the old ways
Gone now and scattered.
The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
The bora ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal
My Country

The love of field and coppice
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins.
Strong love of grey-blue distance,
Brown streams and soft, dim skies
I know, but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror
The wide brown land for me!

The stark white ring-barked forests,
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon,
Green tangle of the brushes
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree-tops,
And ferns the warm dark soil.

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When, sick at heart, around us
We see the cattle die
But then the grey clouds gather,
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the rainbow gold,
For flood and fire and famine
She pays us back threefold.
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze ...
An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand
though Earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.

Dorothea MacKellar
White Stucco Dreaming

Sprinkled in the happy dark of my mind
Is early childhood and black humour
White stucco dreaming
And a black Labrador,
An orange and black panel-van
Called the ‘black-banana’
With twenty blackfellas hanging out the back
Blasting through the white stucco umbilical
Of a working class tribe,
Front yards studded with old black tyres
That became mutant swans overnight
Attacked with a cane-knife and a bad white paint job

White stucco dreaming
And snakes that morphed into nylon hoses at the terror of Mum’s scorn,
Snakes whose cool venom we sprayed onto white stucco,
Temporarily blushing it pink
Amid an atmosphere of Saturday morning grass cuttings
And flirtatious melodies of ice-cream trucks
That echoed through little black minds and sent the Labrador insane

Chocolate hand prints like dreamtime fraud
Laid across white stucco
And mud cakes on the camp stove
That just made Dad see black,
No tree was ever safe from tree-house sprawl,
And the police cars that crawled up and down the back streets,
Peering into our white stucco cocoon,
Wishing, they were with us . . .

Samuel Wagan Watson
Last Exit to Brisbane

Boundary St

that forged black scratch

a vein from Southbank to West End
with a tail swallowed by the chocolate river

this is the line, the limit
where the dark skin were told-

DO NOT CROSS!

a fence raised to protect the colonial domiciles of angels and
gadflies

and even today, at rush hour
that tar permanently keeps the scar alive
and the dead language buried
to only escape in the bitumen heat-haze
and fall upon deaf ears
as this boundary continues to stay true
to its makers
denying the junkyard dingo
the treasures of Easy St
fringe-dwelling in white-light static
on the last exit to Brisbane

Samuel Wagan Watson