

*I Will Never*  
Jennifer Harrison

*I will never. . . Once in a lifetime. . . I never expected this*  
says my mother of her ninety-one years as she accepts  
the pandemic's loneliness: fewer visitors, glum global news,  
failing vision, long days spent inside a small flat annexed  
to a nursing home. I wonder what it might be like to be  
her age and think about a world she will soon enough  
be leaving, though we never mention this on the phone.  
I think of honey combed from the sun by eucalypts, tough  
leatherwoods, clovers, manuka, tea tree, wildflower,  
acacia: all the seasonal weathers coaxing powder pollen  
into clouds of dark bees, swarming. And I recall the monster  
hive that appeared one summer in the great gum's blossom  
outside our window, a tree so big it was featured in all  
the local council maps: *a significant tree* that I imagined  
was visible from outer space: a satellite spindly pictogram  
like the Great Wall of China or the white handkerchiefs pinned  
to north and south poles. The hive was as big as a basketball  
and hummed with sonic fever: a river, endlessly churning.  
If something is missing now, I still want that sweetness inside  
all the hive's combs – though hidden it can be imagined.  
The tree obeyed each season's cyclical codes: the shredding  
of dry leaves, brittle twigs, yellow fluff-flowers, gumnuts –  
each shower falling in crescendo, successively ebbing,  
our courtyard always a carpet of littered mess.  
Whatever is missing now can't be found in the new moon  
shadowing the emptier, sparse, white-branched canopy,  
the heavy trunk smooth as a ghost, a spiritual tableau.  
Even the possums were spooked by the cacophony of bees.  
I can't remember now if the bees slept. I think not. The tree  
has since been chopped down, neighbours weeping to see it go,  
though dangerously unsafe, too large. Too wanton. Too free.  
I imagine honey as the earth's mind tasting sweetness,  
soporific, lofty – the tree's moods probing air's essence.  
Today I sit in a room watching my young cousin's  
virtual funeral, the eulogies static and inaudible, the faces  
of my family enlarged somehow by grief. Lonely. Voyeuristic.  
A statue the way I sit here, parted from death, adrift.  
This morning, no bees, but I hear their elastic song  
reaching towards a clearing, maybe a rosebush, a wattle,  
wild lavender, brown boronia, or dandelions puff-nodding  
in someone's suburban lawn. Nothing in the world's floral  
metre is as remote or as patterned as the rituals of grieving.  
*Yeats said a pity beyond telling is hid in the heart of love.*  
Raindrift. Honeylaw. Neologisms tying up threads.  
*He's not in the world anymore*, I think, watching figures in mauve  
and black pile out of the church, mimed hymns lingering.  
How should a panegyric end, tree? Brambles, shrubs

dying off, somehow flourishing into new green hubs?  
The hive now a shield fashioned from bronze, a memory  
holding life within, the earth's protection in its wake.