

Jan Owen

# The cut

Yesterday, killing time in a draughty booth  
with Signorina Domani,  
albino deaf-mute tapping her slender throat,  
I could hear the last of the rickety sideshows  
touting their glitzy sinister still-and-now  
while the old hands dexterously fixed to go—  
screches and cries were the final guy ropes  
sheeting out August sky,  
the big top already a shuddery pancake  
over the ground at the end of the paddock,  
the end of the fair.  
What's to become of us, Signorina,  
the whole caboodle forever shunted on?  
Touching tomorrow's shimmering hologram,  
breathing the not-quite-musk in a just-left room.

I cut. She dealt them orderly out,  
a pattern of ten  
face down like a cyclone in disgrace:  
first choice is the mother of chance,  
you sense too late you're dragged on  
backwards into the dark.  
She was leaning in to the moment,  
her loose hair brushing my cheek,  
but her white blind face was a slammed door.  
I remember her breath sucked in,  
her hand abruptly turning up  
the Hanged Man and the Six of Cups,  
a certain hesitation over the Three of Swords,  
and never a word.

If I had reached out then  
and stroked that pallid cheek,  
citing the softest law of physics,  
the purest equations of song,  
with offerings of apple-green,  
all hope attuned to this—  
*beloved arm death of the sun hold on—*  
would I have felt the trembling of the pack,  
would I have known?  
But I was young and sure that happiness  
had solid walls. Bright house of cards!  
The least things kept for long enough  
turns treasure though—just then  
a sagging sequin on her cloak  
pooled the glow of the kero lamp.  
Somewhere outside,  
a child laughed sharply in surprise,  
first tasting the soft grey light.

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Jan Owen is a writer and editor who lives near coastal scrub south of Adelaide. Her fifth book, *Timedancing*, was published in 2002 and a volume of her collected poems is forthcoming with John Leonard Press.

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