

## Woman on a Book Cover

*O, girl, you have opened my eyes, how they weep!*

Rachel Long

The sun's moved off the garden. The ground is cooling down. In bikini bottoms, I walk the length of the washing line, reading from the pages of print I have pegged there. You might notice the tears in my eyes. *I've been like a madwoman I tell you on my knees scrubbing till I couldn't anymore.* You ask why. *Every white surface in this house is a piece of paper that you want to write on but you don't know what to write so you hold your biro between your finger and thumb and you tap tap tap and form your own little galaxy in negative floating in the corner of your empty page.* You ask if I am talking about the fly shit. Yes, I am talking about the fly shit. I've been bouncing off glass, turning away from open windows, hitting my head and falling to the floor, defecating in a frenzy. What's brought this on? I perform little skips on the tips of my toes like clicks of a ball point pen and I sweep my arm along the line of pages hanging by pegs. I want to give you the long story. I ordered myself a friend online who turned out to be a woman on a book cover. I can't see her face because her photo was taken from behind, so obviously she can't see mine, and it goes without saying she's mute. Saving graces are she wears a dress that's striped in the colours of days at the seaside and on her head she wears a crown of real roses (scented), plus I know she must have ears under her hair, and in a way, it's quite nice she can't talk because she listens. We hung out in the hot tub together this afternoon (she was propped up on the side) and I told her all about a dream I had last night where you told me you loved the bones of me then took me to a guy whose T-shirt read *Whiteboner*, who boiled me then stripped my cooked flesh using an industrial pressure washer. He left me in the sun so my skeleton would bleach pure white. We were in the desert. And that must be why there were so many flies. One landed on the shoulder of my muted friend's dress – a pistachio flavoured stripe: vomit on her – digest her – ingest her – *don't you fucking touch her!* I cross the hot tub and swat it away, but I swat too hard and I knock the woman down. Down she falls, a forward fall – she must have been high because she turns a full rigid somersault before impact – bubbles force her under. *Way you look at me gets me feeling my lips have turned into wings beating together five thousand times a minute.* It's getting dark – Oh baby – you say – let's forget about this, jump back into the tub, drink some wine, turn up the heat, the stars are almost out and it's going to be a clear night – Yes, the stars are almost out. I can see

Venus baring her tits. *Show me Cassiopeia queen with verbal diarrhoea – where's Corona Borealis? O, remind me how you threw up Ariadne's diadem!* But you won't talk so I walk the washing line end to end, reading aloud from the pages I've pegged there. Constellations are shapeshifters. Your Ariadne is missing a gem – she plucked the brightest from her crown and gave it to my friend – woman on a book cover wears it in her navel – she let it burn through her skin – set it into her heavenly body, and then look at what she did! I walk the washing-line end to end, I'm shouting the words at you now: *abattoir pendant glinting abandon*, they hit you in the face like stones. *She's inviting me to choose a star...* hands to my abdomen *what do you think I should do?* My hips are starting to tip, centre of gravity shifts left then right like a sex dream you had where I didn't speak but wrote the word *yours* in the air with a sparkler wedged in my knickers, trying not to burn myself. Trying not to burn myself! Now I writhe, a supernova in my belly. Look up! We're a flashmob – one by one stealing stars from the skies, and we rise, roses in our hair, platinum and gold hardening inside, shimmying just one breath away from history's most massive explosion. Look at us, ready to belch out stardust. We rewrite the cosmos – our ink is made of light.