

Flesh and Stone

by Erika Byrne-Ludwig

Someone in a slippery raincoat walks by with rubber boots friction and suction sounds. It's raining: a heavy, vigorous, insistent rain. The willows across the road are kneeling in ocher mud. On the tall eucalyptus, the kookaburra preens and realigns its feathers. Mia gauges the will of the wind, looking at the leaves around her and at the wings of the honey eaters. The grevillea leans over her verandah with an imploring air of mendicinity. This is nature when subdued to the deluge. She shrugs: smudged and dripping watercolours.

Inside, dry, she watches. She didn't welcome the rain this morning, nor did she yesterday or the day before that. It's been wet for more than a week and might never stop, ever ever. Each day brings more clouds, more grey, more threat. Water is alive. It feels that way to her. In a moment of dread she presses her hands around her neck to prevent it slithering up. What if the rain *didn't* stop, she reflects: no sun, just floods, boats, debris, people and animals floating, flowers and trees submerged, birds unable to land, roost or feed. A lost world.

In the meantime she turns to face the back garden. A stone statue stands in the middle, insensitive to the wet, to the slow erosion of her body. Even if the rain whips her, she lets it fall on her bare shaded-white figure. Mia contemplates her. How the shawl of rain keeps falling off her shoulders down to her feet, splashing her moss-and-lichen-encrusted ankles and calves ...

She wishes she could switch her flesh with her stone just for one day, get rinsed, bleached, eroded, without feeling. Walk back inside alive with renewed mind and vision, freed of worries and of all the thoughts she had hoarded in the past weeks. Healed.

She looks away from the statue. On the eucalyptus, the kookaburra is leaving its branch. Her eyes follow the bird. Somewhere, there must be a dry tree.

