

THE QUARRY

Alyssa Byrnes

He Disappeared into a Bottle

Some used to talk,
obligation building in the throat;
'How's John?'
asked for the sake of asking.
Though they knew,
rather, didn't know.
Lips pursed in the silence,
discomfort clear in shifting eyes,
hopeful for swift response.

Nieces and nephews knowing they
have an uncle, never *really* known,
never *really* knowing who he is.
Vague memories slip, of who
they might have recognised,
once,
at Christmas time, around
an old table,
calloused hands around
a bottle
of something or other, unimportant
/quite important/
comfortable in a rough palm,
a cigarette pinched in the other hand,
and ten years later,
the burnt acid scent reminds us of
a lost uncle,
lost man.

But how lost is lost?
There is an overwhelming
loss
but we know where to look,
most days of the week.
But does he? (Feel lost?)
While we search, at a loss
following empty footprints
round and round.

Drowning deep beneath,
a bottle cap, in
government home,

shaky legs and mess
of teeth and muted TV,
flyblown fruit skins
left on almost bare
benchtops
to rot.

Or not, not
intentionally at least.
So, he forgot,
where they go
where he goes.
Where does he go?
Does he know,
as he wanders,
further from home.