

The Whelp

Suzi Mezei

When the farm closed and the bowed gate left a gouge in the dirt for the last time
and the school closed like a leaf curled under December's glare,
there was nothing left to do but take up with the local mob,
the lads who sprouted fluff above their upper lips and mumbled
for want of better words, the ones whose eyes were cast eternally down
unless they looked you square in the face on the delivery of a fist.
And so to death, they rolled the utes before their fathers sold them,
the dry an ocean of dust, that engulfed them,
fags and flecks of dead earth spat by the back roads, through downed windows
made them cough and suck down beer like starved alxies on a brewery's teat
and all the way to the north paddock, they sliced him with jibes and ruffled his hair,

their hard flannelled shoulders nudged him viciously 'til he accepted his lot and took the gun.
Mick slapped his back, made his sharp bones rattle,
their fair-haired pup, the quiet first-timer, the hopeless virgin;
with something like love, they helped him load and steady the barrel,
barked him into the gaping maw of his new pack.
Despite the hot wind that knocked him about, pushed him back
and just to spite their puerile misplaced howls, their razor-wire laughs,
he made a kill-face to shut them up,
then with the tip of his finger, he traced the trigger.
The roos watched unflinching behind tussocks.
He'd always remember how the gun felt wrong in his hands.

Suzi Mezei is a Sri Lankan born Australian writer. She is widely published and works in several genres although poetry is her favourite. She loves dogs, film festivals and photos of Morocco. She hopes this year will be better than the last!