

DISAPPEARING ACT
Michael Buckingham Gray

‘Hello,’ he says, ‘hello.’

He waits a moment and after no reply pushes on the front door. He walks down the hallway. He turns his head. The front room is empty. An axe rests next to the fireplace. He continues down the hallway. The kitchen is quiet too. He opens the back door. A pair of trousers and a shirt flutter on the clothesline. He swivels and walks back through the house and inspects all the rooms again. In the front room, the axe no longer sits beside the fireplace. His eyes widen. He runs through the front door and does not turn back.

FALLOUT

Tacita French

Bob is sitting in his lounge when he hears the explosion overhead. He ducks between his sofa and coffee table, spilling his beer. The TV snaps off and the car alarms in the street are wailing.

Shaking, Bob peers over the windowsill. Outside, his neighbours are leaving their homes and staring up at the blue sky. In the centre there is a grey splotch of cloud with spiralling arms.

It starts to rain and Bob's neighbours are yelling and pointing. A large piece of metal smashes through a windscreen and a door crashes onto somebody's roof, scattering tiles everywhere. Then red bits splat onto the tarmac road. And now his neighbours are screaming and running back inside. Bob covers his ears and shuts his eyes, trying to block out the clattering on his roof.

Eventually the raining stops. He lifts himself up and wipes his damp forehead. He feels sick. Outside, the street is littered with debris, body parts and blood. In the distance, he can hear the sound of approaching sirens.

Bob wipes his sweaty hands on his trousers. Something in his garden catches his attention and he walks to the patio doors. In his pool, there is a plane seat, floating upright like a sail. Gingerly, he crosses the garden, taking care to avoid the assorted debris on the lawn. He seizes the seat with both hands and lifts it out of the water. The weight catches him unawares and he topples backwards, cradling the seat in his arms like a baby.

Recovering, he carries the seat into his kitchen, where he gently rubs it down with a soft towel. Miraculously, the seat is intact apart from a

small tear on one arm. He searches for a tube of glue at the back of a cupboard. He brings out antiseptic, then Bonjela, but finally the superglue. With shaking fingers, he seals the leather back and eases out the creases. Satisfied with the result, he takes the seat back outside and places it beside a sunbed. Then he reaches for his net and starts to clear his pool, emptying the burnt contents onto his lawn.