



MARGARET RIVER
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SUMMARY

*A woman adjusts to her new urban landscape.
A slaughterman comes to terms with the death of his wife.
A rodeo ringer blows into town, wreaking havoc.*

In this collection, we venture across distinct terrains—inviting and inhospitable, familiar and unknowable—into worlds of past, future and present. In settings that shift between the mundane and extraordinary, these short stories illuminate our continuous search for truth and what it means to find our way back home.

'Surely, that which makes a story collection meaningful has to be more than "craft". *Skyglow* could be distilled to its elements: stories eclectic in nature, each finely rendered; an evocation of place that makes me long for the Western Australian landscape and a Kimberly night sky. Yet at the core lies something pervasive: an uncomfortable truth, a tenderness that comes from knocking a deep bruise. Leslie Thiele's *Skyglow* grazes thwarted hopes, silent losses, the visceral skin of ordinary lives.'—Robyn Mundy, author of *Wildlight* and *The Nature of Ice*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie Thiele is a writer based in the south west of Western Australia. Her short fiction centres around her characters reactions to the world they live in and social change. A keen student of human nature in all its manifestations, Leslie drops people into imagined situations and environments and waits to see what they will do. Recently completing her Bachelor of Arts in creative writing and literature at Edith Cowan University's regional campus in Bunbury has further refined her writing and led to her gaining recognition for pieces of her work in various competitions, events and spoken performances.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

LIGHT POLLUTION

1. Embedded in this story is the notion of belonging. Do you think belonging is connected more to people or to place?
2. Light pollution is created by human activity yet has far reaching effects for nocturnal creatures, especially migratory birds. In what ways has the abundance of artificial light affected our own lives. Is the balance sheet to our benefit or detriment?

MAGPIE SEASON

1. Birds are used throughout literature as harbingers and messengers. What do you consider is the magpie's role in Teresa's life?
2. Do you subscribe to the idea that animals/birds ever enter into interactions with humans with intent other than instinct alone?

WILDING

1. This story deals with the importance of nature, and wild places, in our lives. What effect do you think our gradual removal from the natural world has on our wellbeing?
2. Alex lives in a world where everything, even pregnancy, is completely controlled by authorities. What would we lose in a world such as this – and what might we gain?

THE SLAUGHTERMAN

1. Paul has arrived back at his work still grieving the death of his wife Josie. Grief often acts as a catalyst for change in our world view. Do you think this is the case here?
2. Nature has recovered with the new laws in place much faster than expected. Is it ever too late to repair the environment?

INSHALLAH

1. Jacques has been badly affected by his involvement in the crusades. In what ways does conflict make us question our assumptions and beliefs?
2. Can faith be changed in nature rather than lost altogether – and if so, is our faith still valid?

THE RECIPE FOR JAM

1. Essentially a love story, *The Recipe for Jam* explores how the lens through which we view others colours our perceptions. What is the difference between the jam made by Edith and that made by Marjorie?
2. Do you resonate with Marjorie when she insists on 'a small house with big windows, rather than a mansion with none'? Why?

AIR THAT I BREATHE

1. Joyce is a girl growing up under strict gender assumptions. Have we moved far enough away from these stereotypes now, or is there still work to be done? How might society achieve this?
2. Francis, now, is nothing like the dashing young man Joyce met all those years ago. He has the beginnings of dementia and has become querulous. In growing old alongside

someone, do we always see who they were or who they are now? To what degree?

THE GINGERBREAD MAN

1. Why is Sophie unable to break away from her husband Geoff in this scenario? Discuss all the small (and large) ways people can be controlled, and exert control, within relationships.
2. The Gingerbread Man has always struck me as being a particularly creepy rhyme. What childhood tales or songs have this effect on you? Why?

CONVERSATION

1. Body language is a powerful way to get our point across. Words can both wound and heal. What gestures do you think most clearly express feeling?
2. Do you think Lila's father depends on her too much emotionally? Why?

WHERE I CAN SEE YOU

1. Ellie imagines the wild forest by her home to hold the answers to her questions about family. Discuss the role of woods and forests in our literary mythology.
2. What do you think might have happened to Ellie's baby brother? Is the mother in this story a monster or a victim? Discuss.

THE BOUGH SHED

1. Ian has decided he wants to break away from the family farm. In what ways do we place demands on family members to fulfil our own expectations for them? Is this sometimes valid?
2. The events in this story are told from Sarah's point of view. What do you feel the ramifications of this tragedy might have on the various members of this family?

NO TROUBLE

1. What do you think Snow's motivation was in calling his neighbour Johnny out to pick up his wandering steer?
2. There is violence at the base of this story – both overt and implied – before which Snow seems helpless. Are there other ways he could have handled this situation? What alternative outcomes could there have been?

THE BLOW IN

1. Mallory is a character imbued with tenderness and a lifetime of awful luck. Is there any chance his luck will change in the future? Would you be comfortable welcoming him into your life knowing this?
2. Why do you think the black colt capitulated under Mallory's leadership? Do animals have the capacity to make rational choices?
3. What part do you think courage plays in this story as it pertains to Mallory? To Bob the horse?

HORSES

1. Suse and Dodo are both connected to the family farm. One will do anything to stay, the other wants to leave. How do family expectations and responsibilities bind us to the places we grow up in?



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2. Do family farms have a different dynamic than a family home? Why?

HARBOUR LIGHTS

1. Tanya comes face to face with someone from her past who has done her a great wrong. In the dilemma she faces she must weigh up the cost of revisiting a painful event she has managed to mostly bury. What are her motivations for the decision she ultimately makes? What might be the cost.
2. Do you think Tanya's mother knew something awful had happened to her? If so, why did she not ask more questions of her daughter?

THE BOAT

1. What does the boat symbolise in Vic's life at the time of purchase? What does it come to mean later?
2. What is at the base of the relationship between Vic and Sandra? Is he rebelling against his wife, his life or himself?

ASHORE

1. This story is based on the loss of Thomas Vasse in Geographe Bay during an attempt to rescue a scientific party stranded ashore from the Baudin voyage of 1801 from France. Lost overboard, Thomas was never seen again by Europeans, yet rumours abounded as to his eventual fate. How do you think he may have been approached by the indigenous people living in the area?
2. Stranded in a land so strange to him, how might he have reacted when he realised the ship he travelled on was gone?

FRENCH LINEN

1. French Linen deals with the end of a relationship. Do you think, given their argument over the purchase of the sheets, they were doomed from the start?
2. How much of each person is lost in the creation of a couple? Is this always true?

TWO FOUR TIME

1. This story explores family ties. What binds us to family and how do those ties affect the trajectory of our individual lives?
2. Do you think the loss of Nan's foot was a genuine accident? Why?

YOURS ALONE

1. How important is it to have something which is for your own pleasure and escape in life? Are we adequately taught to treasure our talents?
2. What did running give Floris?

CATCHING TRAINS TO FRANKSTON

1. Ron is lost within his dementia, no longer able to clearly separate the present from the past. How culpable is he for the murder of Mr Kiamichi?
2. Ron has carried the scars and memories of war throughout his life. Are we, as a society, any better at dealing with these sorts of ingrained traumas now than we were after the second world war? Why?

COMING CLEAN

1. Simon says the difference between their addictions was that Cass took heroin, in the beginning, for the way it made her feel while he took it so he wouldn't have to feel anything. What difference do you think this makes in their connection to the drug and the likelihood of overcoming it?
2. It was Cass who introduced heroin to Simon. How much guilt should she ultimately carry for his addiction, if any?

THE MEDAL

1. This story takes us back to Ron, before he developed dementia, honouring a promise to a fallen mate. Why do you think it has taken him so long? Do you believe it will give him peace?
2. Why does the fact there are wild places still help Ron believe there might have been a pointy to the conflict he and Jonesy had been involved in?

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Smart Ovens for Lonely People by Elizabeth Tan

Here Until August by Josephine Rowe

This Taste for Silence by Amanda O'Callaghan

Portable Curiosities by Julie Koh

After the Carnage by Tara June Winch

COMMENTARY

'Surely, that which makes a story collection meaningful has to be more than "craft". *Skyglow* could be distilled to its elements: stories eclectic in nature, each finely rendered; an evocation of place that makes me long for the Western Australian landscape and a Kimberly night sky. Yet at the core lies something pervasive: an uncomfortable truth, a tenderness that comes from knocking a deep bruise. Leslie Thiele's *Skyglow* grazes thwarted hopes, silent losses, the visceral skin of ordinary lives.'—Robyn Mundy