

VALERIE COOMBE

FOOLS' GOLD

There was a time
I walked on close-cut grass
and felt its lushness press about my thighs.
I'd take a short-cut through the park,
where every tree or shrub or plot of flowers
threw rich-hung tendrils out
to drench me in their scent and colour.
Streets were blue-grey streams
I'd swim down without effort.
Trams were musical.
Stones by the roadside promised gold –
I had not heard of fools' gold, then.
You brought me frangipanni,
its perfume keen as pain.
Cicadas sang my summer nights away,
and every day bright birds would play
their magic flute.

It was a magic time.

And, slowly, magic became your stock-in-trade.
Lush grasses, tall enough to wade through,
shrank, as I watched, to faded stubble.
Parks were mutilated,
and rank with the fear of rape.
Streets were housed with threats,
parched under fumes
of diesel buses.
Silent birds sat, stiff,
on the scentless frangipanni tree,
like cardboard cut-outs
in a cardboard world.

Fools' gold had always been
fools' gold.