and I, too vain to refrain
from that one last magnificent shot
of the Guatama's face
juxtaposed above a golden jutting toe:
a Daliesque impression if ever there was one.

To clamber over the rails
and nestle against the smooth cold touch of His shoulder
comes as a shock: one is walking upon a God
but then to have a God so compliant and accessible
renders the sacrilege unimportant
and a perfect momento to spirituality
is framed.

IV

Outside the tour guide does not meet our eyes
but later that night, merry on cheap whisky
explains that the Lord Buddha is all things
to all people
and cannot be desecrated
unless one desecrates and shames one's own soul
and we, impressed by such mysticism
agree, and drink on.

CORNELIS VLEESKENS

WOOD SCULPTURE: the Bali letters

Hello Mr David, how are you today? aren't you very well isn't it? I hope
you are get the lucky always and safe of the God. I am in Bali good
health condition also.
I herewith Congratulation for your Merry Christmas and happy new
Except of my says on the above mention, pardon me — please if I've to late for sending the letter to you — with this my letter also I'll give some Information to you about our discuss on the last time that is — wood sculpture which in sending by me and according to you request.

I'm sorry Mr David, if I can't to send the wood sculpture for you, because I'm worry if can't reached to your adress, but if you have another friend will be going to Bali, I hope you can give my adress to the, and than I cant given the wood sculpture for submitted to you straightly and I can also give the service for them travel as like you on the last time. Thats all my letter and don't forget to replied, thank you very much for your well organize, bye bye — see you next time.

***

So here I am, djaling djaling through Melbourne back streets, and suddenly I hear this gamelan music coming out of the window. Open, gauze curtains fluttering on a gentle breeze. Ketjak, Monkey Dance. I stop as the excitement builds up, fingerdancing on the footpath much to the amusement of old Greek ladies catching the last rays of the sun at the front gate.

I see you at dusk in your village, crouched in the dust with the other men in an eerie silence. Storm of voice and instrument about to descend. I called you Hanuman after that, and it made you smile a little behind your mask.

The Monkey King hangs at my backdoor, he doesn't drop his mask, hair a tangle of jasmine vines. Those tribal voices in unison, chattering like monkeys, language where the meaning is in sound, in tone, meaning communicated through voice and movement, not the stilted standardised use of words, official language.

The carved dancers I chose for my mantlepiece, as if magic could be bought for a small sum, some ten times your weekly earnings.

Monkeys, the chattering little thieves, the grooming primitives, who helped in the triumph over evil in the Ramayana. Legend as a life-force.

City streets. Glaring neons depicting words and goods we cannot do without. You do without. I see the blue emblem of Carlton and United. Open the fridge. Twist open a bottle. Monkey King watching through the open window.

***
Monkey. I am suddenly reminded of that time in Laos, in an open-air Vientiane cafe, when someone's pet monkey jumped onto our table, then perched on my three-year-old son's shoulder and commenced grooming his hair. The dissatisfaction of that monkey when he tasted the remains of Johnson's *No Tears* Baby Shampoo, and my son's total acceptance of the situation. No apprehensions. Total trust in someone who shared his cheeky face.

***

*Hello again Mr David, I am writing this letter to say I awaitting your replied to my god wishes when you return to your home.*

*I'm worry if you are not pleased to receive my letter. Or if it cant reached your house. Why I've not senting wood sculpture to date. Many thing here verry good cheap now tourist go.*

*My family think you many time and hope you to enjoy your stay and travel. Also within this letter please to send photo. If you have more moneys to buy good sculpture I no cheap bargin now would like you.*

*That's all my letter again to day, bye bye and next time.*

***

Dear Danoeh, I'm sorry to have been so long in writing. I very much enjoyed our stay with your people and feel that I have learned much about myself through you. The clarity of the music made in the village each night by the men who worked the fields in the day has given me much pleasure and taught me to see that a man can only be complete if he is completely involved in all he does. I had thought myself as two people. The one who worked and the other who is able to enjoy, but seeing life in your village has changed that. I don't know if you can understand that, but believe please that you have helped me very much.

Your letters arrived safely, so there is no need to worry about sending the sculptures. The mail finds me each day and I wait to see them again.

I have sent you some more money, the postmaster at Kuta will be able to tell you which bank can exchange it for cash. I trust you will find a sculpture that I like very much and send it to me.

It felt strange to have to wear so many clothes again in this cold country. We think of you often and hope all of your family is well.

Warm regards.

***
It is three months now, and again I’m filled with apprehensions about
the Monkey King peeking through my window. What is it that makes me
think only of that stupid American Express commercial when I see his
leer? I put on a gamelan record: Music from the Morning of the World in
the Nonesuch Explorer series. Think myself again in that little village
among the terraced hills.
Peace and tranquillity is broken by a noisy motorbike. It seems out of
place in the space inhabited by my thoughts.

***

Hello Mr David, how are you to day? aren’t you verry well isn’t it? I hope
you are get the lucky always and safe of the God . . . I re-read his letters
in their strange idiosyncratic English, picture him laughing as he dives
into the bottomless swimming hole. Shiver. Melbourne autumn.
I don’t begrudge him the money, he has more need of it than I have. In
fact, I rather like the little monkey and his craft, yet I feel betrayed. I had
felt that we had set up some kind of bond, something which slips in and
out of language and thought, something elusive, something at the root
of communication which has been lost in this city existence. Communal.
Sharing. Not hearing from him all these months is like losing touch with
a brother after growing up close.
I sit at my desk, desperately trying to formulate a letter to him explaining
how I feel, but each attempt I crumple up and throw into the wastepaper
bin. There is no way I can explain this, for he does not have the reference
points to which I refer. In his language, there is no word for thief, for
steal, these concepts are foreign to him.
I recall again that cafe in Laos, that other little monkey, and the sudden
squeal when he tweaked my son’s ears to indicate that it was now his
turn.

***

When the parcel arrived, I had given up my anxious waiting for the
postman months ago, it was held together by sticky-tape. Tape with red
writing. Opened for inspection by Australia Customs Opened for inspec.
Inside, a carved monkey and a note, dated 30th January . . .
Dear Mr David, thank you for your kind letter say not to worry send
sculptures. I have discovered you a verry rare monkey very cheap prize. I
hope it bring you the lucky and pleasing time always.
Thats all my quik note as I send this monkey to you home and please to
replied you receive.
Dear, dear Danoeh, in the morning of the world you wait, like I waited. It is custom keeps our minds apart. And Customs. Three months in quarantine. And the feet drilled out to make sure nothing is hidden.

JODY VALENTINE

HAPPY ENDINGS

They were talking, in sad, hushed voices, but with the wry humour that is sometimes called black, about Lost Innocence. Each one had a story to tell. A Death of a loved one. A Rape. A Betrayal.

Scott said “What about you Jo?”, thinking I was still an innocent, “Do you still have the moonlight in your eyes?”. He smiled. He stabbed a slice of camembert. “Still believe in unicorns?”

He was wrong about me. I had lost my innocence, piece by piece. Though, I did believe in unicorns once. As a child, I was a romantic. A dreamer. I believed there were fairies who lived in our mango tree, who danced under the stars. I believed in gnomes, pixies, elves and hobbits. But above all, I believed in Happy Endings.

I wasn’t the sort of child who could go to sleep after something as horrifying as the Three Little Pigs. My mother discovered me, tears on my pillow, a red nose, an hour after bedtime, crying for a lonely old wolf. I didn’t like that self-satisfied little pig who built his house of bricks and I thought the little red hen should have shared her bread with the others even though they hadn’t helped her. My mother soon learnt to modify these horrid stories.

In the Goldilocks story of my youth, the insipid little girl apologises to the Little Bear and helps him build another chair. Goldilocks turns out to be a crash-hot cake maker so they all have chocolate and walnut cake for morning tea. With icing. The Big Bad Wolf climbs down the chimney to be greeted, not by a pot of scalding water, but balloons and streamers. The Pigs sing Happy Birthday and say “And you thought we’d forgotten what day it is today!!”, before the repentant wolf cuts his cake and makes his wish. I felt pity for the Wicked Witches. I knew they were really just sad old souls. I insisted that in the altered endings they were forgiven and invited to dinner.

My mother said I was a little “fixer”. I always wanted the baddies to turn out to be goodies and everyone to be happy.