

Tea

Carol Millner

She stands and pours out, watches the amber liquid flow into the porcelain mug with a chip on the far side. She pours for her father. Only three quarters, because he took a dollop of milk on top. She's wearing a smart dress today, in honour of the occasion.

She stands and pours out, watches the amber liquid flow into a gold rimmed teacup. Autumn flowers dance on the outside surface. On the inside, tiny dots pockmark the white finish. Mould spores have dug into bone. These cups, a gift to her grandparents, have become a set piece and live in cardboard boxes but for this one day of the year.

She stands and pours out for her mother, her grandmother, her great grandmother. She lifts the pot high and brings it down. Tea waterfalls into cups. Fingers of steam rise.

She stands and pours out. A tall, narrow mug for her grandfather, though he'd always had spirits. She should have planned ahead, brought in supplies, but she had almost forgotten the day. Two tin mugs for her grandfather's friends line up beside his, like the men he went to war with.

She pours again, returns to the stove for more hot water, remembers how her brother used to light his cigarette on the gas ring, and how it was that he died, collapsing on to a lit stove just like this one. Early morning. A heart attack, they said. And no one there.

She stands and pours out, an anniversary cup for her brother who died in the land they thought they'd left. Completely alone, and on fire.

Carol Millner's poetry and short stories have been published in Australia and Aotearoa/NZ. She is best known for her chapbook *Poems About the House* (2019) and for her Dorothy Hewett Award shortlisting (2015). Carol recently completed a PhD in creative writing from Curtin University.