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James Norcliffe

The Maya Calendar

Hovering like an impossibly long hummingbird
this blue damselfly hangs in the air like an omen.

The water below is yellow after heavy rain but
the tail of the fly glints sapphire in the summer sun.

Ephemera: the grass browning now, coarse and crisp,
bubbles rising from gas trapped in the mud. Then a flick

and the insect darts off as you too will dart off in your
more ponderous way - driving north, you told us, to where

a woman you once knew waits in a house with three empty
bedrooms and a brown paper bag half-full of persimmons.

There is nothing for you here, you said. Never had been.
You hoped to turn your life around as if it were a wheel, not

a trajectory. The season is spinning past. The hills are falling.
One by one I pluck mantises from my shoulders. Where are

the bees? You will drone north, you say, and cross the water.
But already I am forgetting you, here where the air is hot and empty.

The Map Maker's Mistake

In the bottom left quadrant between two contour lines the map maker carefully inked in the name of a tiny settlement he called *Arangma*. He imagined a single resident sitting on the steps of the war memorial at the crossroads, there to catch the late afternoon sun. The man would lay down his newspaper and wonder when the council was going to do something about the montbretia clumps and barbed billows of blackberry choking the roadside ditches. The bus shelter across the way had seen better days; the railway station would see no more. The first no longer hopes for a bus; the second has abandoned hopes of a train. The weather wall of the old hall with its rusting iron and peeling paint distressed the man. He did not want to think of its sagging stage and frayed curtain. Still there was much to be grateful for. The sun was warm at his back. Tar as black as Indian ink shone on the line that was the road. Nearby a small lake was hatched in blue and the air was pungent with tea tree. Smiling faintly now, the resident would pick up his paper and resume his crossword. A seven letter word from *here now* suggested *Arangma* and nowhere was there a more satisfying place, the map maker thought, to circumvent a plagiarist.