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### *Creative Nonfiction*

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We sit down to a desultory staff-cajoled Christmas dinner at lunchtime on the last Friday in January. Your boss forgets so her sullen nineteen-year old daughter has to attend because they only brought the one Mercedes jeep into town and they need to get back to the eastern suburbs sharpish for some evening soirée and or her daughter's friend's sister's birthday party. Your stalwart Filipina administrator-cum-secretary-cum-PA-cum-office manager who is paid a receptionist's wage arches her eyebrows at you after every glance at the menu oohing and aahing as she orders the more expensive items urging you to do the same. The bookkeeper came in this morning to process your overdue paycheques and Christmas bonuses which are a pittance and will evaporate on back rent as soon as they clear, if they clear, and now your boss has to shell out for a three-course lunch for nine people. You're completely shattered having been left to run the place for two months while she and hers swanned off to Europe staying in four-star hotels. You even went in over Christmas to catch up on admin as your boss doesn't like paper trails and is always saying you keep too many records.

Talk starts up about Christmases at home and your boss's lips start loosening about her aunt back in Ireland who had a child out of wedlock but your boss never knew this or she did and she forgot (or she remembered to forget); so your boss's dad was telling her that the child's father was married so the aunt couldn't keep it, and your boss was asking him why did the aunt live in Thurles for a while and he said it wasn't that long only five years in the Mother and Baby Home. Meaning prison—your boss says—and then she says she bets it was a long five years for the aunt. And you start thinking maybe your boss isn't too bad after all.

Then from nowhere the pissed bookkeeper, because there's always a pissed bookkeeper at a staff do, starts talking about *Redfern Now* and have you seen it? And

you want to start discussing the nuances of the scripts and the finesse of the acting when she starts in on indigenous rights; but not in a good way, not in the way you'd expect from an Australian, and you're barely Australian, they only just stopped trying to deport you so what can you say about being Australian or colonialism or indigenous rights.

You know what you think but it isn't really important because some days on a bridging visa you're practically no more than an asylum seeker, a fact your Australian husband seems to find funny—punchline funny—so you've started to refer to yourself as an economic migrant even though you had a good job before you left home as it's easier to assimilate into the culture of migrants because at least you have something in common with them. You think your husband is out of line when he makes those jokes and you'd like to see him on the other side of the world with his passport marked because he overstayed his working holiday visa on some spurious advice from a migration agent with embossed letterhead who charged you thousands of dollars for the stress when the panic attacks were free.

Luckily you ended up with a kindly official from Canberra saying they wouldn't deport you if you left the country of your own volition within twenty-eight days; got married, came back. But you'd cycle past Wakefield Street Police Station hyperventilating and petrified this was the moment they were going to come out and arrest you. What if you didn't get to stay, or never got to say goodbye, and ended up star-crossed lovers like Nicole Kidman and Mark Harmon or some other American bloke in *Bangkok Hilton*—was that to do with drugs because you don't traffic drugs, maybe it was *Muriel's Wedding*.

And this bookkeeper who you've only met once before keeps banging on about *Redfern Now* and how the Aborigines in the show are like NIDA trained and middle class and how Redfern has nothing to do with indigenous Australia but she once knew a bloke from there and he was pretty sound but times have changed and how black people nowadays aren't really black and she knows black people who are more white than black. And you listen to this shit and seriously consider punching her in the face but you don't because your man, your visa, your job. So, you swivel your privilege towards the waiter and order another bottle of wine.

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—Lauren Foley