

OUTtakes nine to thirty-eight

Cynthia
Troup

Cynthia Troup (she/
her) lives on Dja Dja
Wurrung Country.
Her creative work
is often concerned
with the inherent
musicality of language,
and the allusive
richness of fragments.
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Through the chase-and-grab of British Bulldog at
lunchtime__unchosen for the centre *it* gang__mauled by
shame I keep running in the small body given to me
so__scared of the half-hearted tackle that says we know
you don't count for the boys' winning side__you're never
it just plain out__In a family of girls I still hope I'm like
my father__

I run how I can at nine__by now the faithful given form's
begun to be parcelled out__all my stubborn sisters and
me trying to be and become__what we're not__In
headband and short shorts the new PE teacher tests one
day how we run__the biomechanics__Each Grade Four
in turn sprints toward Mister Crean__I chase me on rough
asphalt__in the short body given to me she crashes past
his elbow biro clipboard__it's clear you can't run he
announces to the class__whole__class__breath
won't__be caught sweat creeps out__clings to her face
everywhere I see laughter__hear no difference between
able and allowed you__can't run__but after school there
are tennis lessons with the slender Brownells__

Shoes with grief in them__Go on maybe every test is a
trap__line up__again too close to the net__What's the end
of competition?__

Brownish spots bloom on my schooldress__Me and the
given rounding form fall out__dog eat dog running on
willpower I stalk a mirror of her__no clear thought or
feeling about the final shape of success though
about__how to belong these holey bones to it__

Slick months of calorie counts and scale readings were
wildly out__the surface body I judge find wanting__dear
wanting is pent for strict bedrest in Ward 21__a room
opposite Reception__alone and she's *not* to be conversed
with__My father writes__right: either you make every
effort to eat more or you threaten the chances of being
out__by Christmas we want you home with us__

One nightshift nurse does speak with me__When she
strips the bed I stand__hopping leg to leg in the ground of
her goodwill__jog of voice sway of feeling cue here I

exist!__She figures me a fan of the dating quiz show
Perfect Match hey__you get the compere's codeword for
sex is romance? Oh__

And none of me gets I could press for news of
Martina__her latest grand slam__Miss Navratilova who
knows she knows the game inside out__A letter the same
week adds but maybe you've outgrown the holiday
pantomimes__At fourteen and scant on all sides I__don't
yet understand that yes if true *if*__true is dead-simply a
secret of love__

Instead of the worst something saner with grace__furred
strong and lithe__gains the centre *it* place in
me__Gradually__outpacing shame__

Snug café clatter sounds harsh and high-pitched__like a
dog (not a child) in despair I think__and scan for my
mother__Having guessed the blood obvious hasn't
been__this lunchtime I for us needs must declare Alice
and me we're lovers since last August Ma__

Her jaw tilts belly clenches I'm sensing higher up in mine
and__sip water__game set and match a grown daughter's
out and out__lost favour she never knew she had__Our
table empty but for pepper and salt__two pairs of hands
wait apart__

It's a Friday midyear after orchid season and Alice's calm
when I asked to kiss her eyes__sure bless nowise out of
the blue__Ma doesn't accept they you can be
real__mutters God I have to tell your father and__what
happens now? Who we are is happening always
beginning comes the reply__maybe at thirty-eight I'm
across the difference between able and allowed__

D'you remember smash happy Ma__how nothing in the
body's a hard straight line?__Loneliness in marriage is
where the next breath takes her__dashed free of the net
we just listen raw__

Tears later with ourself I run__night run quiet and dream
the Brownells my sisters__all edgy unique too early
flattened out__the strain of learnt hope__Depths ever
faithful the given body lets us give to become being
whole at life and lucky__ swing arms open in their own
grammar __ greet the playground full willing __ rise turn
bristle as if the light __ possibility __

distinct enough