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*Meniscus*, an online literary journal featuring poetry and creative prose, is published twice a year.

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### **About Meniscus**

*Meniscus* is a literary journal, published and supported by the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) with editors from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

The title of the journal was the result of a visit made by two of the editors to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, where James Turrell's extraordinary installation, 'Within without' (2010), led them to think about how surfaces, curves, tension and openness interact. In particular, they were struck by the way in which the surface of the water features, and the uncertainty of the water's containment, seems to analogise the excitement and anxiety inherent in creative practice, and the delicate balance between possibility and impossibility that is found in much good writing.

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## THE OFFERING

Anne Ryden

Her voice is drowning in the rapid tapping of her feet on the wooden floor. He leans closer to the dusty mesh between them. *What is it, my dear? You can tell me.* Her feet keep up their involuntary tap-dance, and he waits, straining to hear in case she speaks again.

Two days later when she returns, her feet are calm, and though her voice is wavering, she never falters in the telling. He hears of a summer many years ago when one bright day after another turned bleak. He hears of a little girl's exuberance at seeing new things and feels her pull away when she sees things she should not. Her words fill him with melancholy. Yet he knows that this is his calling, and he once more offers himself: *My dear, share your burden.*

She leaves.

His compassion for humankind is unquestionable, and his service to the lord unwavering. He aches for her pain. He thinks he may now truly know what it means to take on the suffering of others. If only she had stayed, she could have found [ solace, and he ... He kneels, maybe he prays.

In the days that follow, she moves through life like she has for so many years. She is there for a friend who has had some bad news; she goes on a date with a man of some promise; she works, she spends time with her children, she leads her normal life. Some time later, when she finds herself outside that place again, she is unable to fight the urge to go in, to sit down, to try to speak.

Hope and joy pulse through his being; how he has craved her return. Now, maybe, finally, he can help her, as he has known he must since that

time long ago when he was hauled to the lord in the greatest need of sanctuary.

She is so close. And she speaks. Of seeing, of touching, of being made to forgive; of the beauty of the softest of soft skin. Of consenting to the unconsentable, of forgiving the unforgivable.

He shivers in the dense air. She is still so beautiful. Her fear so tangible. Her recoil, divine. He longs to show his gratitude. For her to know that her gift to him was so much greater than the one he bestowed upon her: that her silence made him a safe path for his life's journey.

And she, in the dusty booth, in her walk through life, in her days of sunshine and growing, of darkness and fury, knows that even with a voice, the unspeakable remains.

In his grace and kindness. In her failure and guilt. There are no words.