

Habeas Corpus

Babs the Peel and Seal Envelope is distraught.

Can you believe that? Someone licked me then sent me off empty.

*She's crumpled. Oh Babs, you should've given that person
a paper cut. Our poor poet, receiving an empty SSAE.*

Do you think it was an acceptance lost or a rejection ejected?

And no return address... It makes Haby the Stamp curl.

Honestly, Babs it's not your fault the letter fell out.

Yellow Betty the Notepad is listening hard,

her mind seems feint these days. *Betty's having one of her
enjambments. She's very thin, says Babs,*

pondering the wastepaper basket.

*Haby and Babs, stop being stationary, bossy Mr Parker Pen
shouts. Look, Babs is postmarked Melbourne,
that must mean the Wheelers and Dealers!*

It looks like an AusPost mini-break for you three.

Mr Pen writes a cover letter—*more like under cover* he winks.

Not so many words, says Haby, how much ink

*do you think I can carry? Despite bad dreams about sorting machines
and the dead letter office, Haby's keen to travel before he gets
stuck in a stamp album. Babs, Betty, let's hit the road.*

Babs, you're an envelope, you can't have claustrophobia.

Just wait till we're out of this bag and in with the in-tray crowd.

But first, says Haby, we need to discover who licked you.

Sorry Babs, I didn't mean to make you blush.

Friday morning the stationery lies doggo in the Wheelers'
in-tray, *Till we get the page to ourselves...* says Haby.
Why are they Wheelers? Do poets ride cycles? asks Betty.
More like re-cycle, says Haby.
Shssh, sotto voce or the whole office will hear, says Babs.
In a discrepancy between appearance and reality
they hear click click click at noon and the lights go out.
The onomatopoeia of aircon, copiers and computers fades to zip.
Quiet as three ellipses, except for, except for ... what is that
overhead? The smooching of couplets and the travel gossip
of stamps is drifting down like *Snow in Nagoya*.

The poems are trapped! We'll have to free Verse ourselves,
says Babs. *Ourselves,* echoes Betty for emphasis.
Haby recognises the voice of a stamp,
That's Negative Capability! Top bloke on the sheet I trained
with. They scan the ceiling above the in-tray,
Listen, if the in-tray gang were to form a house of letters,
Babs goes for the subjunctive, *one of us could climb it!*
Oh Babs, let's get franked; we'd make the perfect couplet, says Haby.

The letters juxtapose into a Tower of Babel, which Haby
climbs like a ladder, until he pushes aside the loose caesura in the ceiling.
Babel, Haby—what a nice half rhyme, says Betty.
Thousands of unopened envelopes end-stop on the carpet.
Out fall an elegy of lyric and language poems with identifier
postmarks: Come-by-Chance, Nevertire, Woy Woy, Omeo,
Wagga Wagga, Kangy Angy, Humpty Doo, Goolwa.

But where are the Melbourne postmarks? asks Betty.

It's a miracle I got out, says Babs.

Beepin, beeps. Haby's gone all cursive.

Watch your l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e,

says Betty, *none of that Hejinian stuff here!*

(God, some poems need their mouths washed out with soap,

says Babs.) The poems claim they've been rejected

'cause they weren't concrete and they weren't invited.

Who'd want to read poems like cement? asks Betty abstractly.

I've got some friends in the press, says Haby,

what say we take a sestina, and wait for the next issue?

Carol Jenkins & Julie Chevalier