

**Alana Brekelmans**  
**Stefen's Sky Needle**  
*One Page: Brisbane*  
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# stefan's sky needle

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When the heat draws like a funeral pall over your sweating body when you toss, when you twist, when you turn your stale bed-sheet into an origami straightjacket, when the 2 am breeze carries the scent of mangroves, jasmine flower, and too-hot pavement to your Queenslander home, when you feel that hostile energy, that listless discontentment, that choking confusion rising within you, and think that maybe nothing else is real except for the heat and the night, then you know that have no other choice but to walk.

The moon is a sickle in the sky, and your footsteps echo through the not-quite-empty streets. The skyline before you bites into the clouds. You remember how when you first moved to this city you never slept and you'd blamed it on those clouds.

The sky's all wrong here, you'd said in a long-distance phone call. You felt that perhaps the world had turned upside down and you'd somehow been left behind because you could see glistening lights in the valley below, but nothing in the sky above. Nothing, except for those clouds, ghostly, aglow, always reflecting the city lights and pollution, caught in the summer subsidence inversion.

You remember too, the sickening feeling you'd got when you first saw the rainbow throb of the Stefan's Skyneedle: so obscure, so phallic, so purposeless, shooting up the once-pure sky, injecting the crook of night. Someone once told you that when the light at the needle's point changed colour it means a fresh supply of cocaine had reached town. You'd laughed, but you'd thought then (and still think now) that of all the urban legends and guide-book tales about Brisbane this story makes the most sense.

Three years on and you've grown used to it all: this city and the skyline and the mirrored ceiling and the writhing glow beneath. If anything, you've grown bored of it, now you are part of it.

You pause on your walk. A street lamp flickers. A snatch of late-night infomercial pinballs between the rows of houses. A dog barks. Broken glass glistens.

That glisten reminds you of the shark you'd seen earlier in the day. The shark had flashed silver in mid-summer sunlight, its body flaying in the dry grass as the fisherman took photos of it on his iPhone. You'd said the shark

was beautiful, and the fisherman thought you were congratulating him. He'd smiled, nodded, kept taking photos.

Stop. That's what you'd meant to say, Stop. It's in pain. Please, you'd meant to plead, either set it free, or kill it now.

You didn't, of course. You'd said it was beautiful (which you've always thought means the same thing, but the fisherman wasn't to know that). You'd kept on walking. Now, hours later, you find yourself walking again. Now, the shark follows you, rippling in the bitumen, rising up in your throat, splashing fat shiny drops on your glasses so your vision is skewed.

You round the bend and arrive at the place where everything is happening, where all the young and beautiful twenty-somethings, thirty-somethings, sixty-somethings are drinking to either prove or forget something or other and let one muggy today become another muggy tomorrow. There are midweek horse-race winnings, and first-time-playing gigs, trivia nights, and cocktail therapy. Pay days. Yiros. Jazz music. Acoustic guitar. Christmas. Pizza. Buy a big issue please miss. Jesus Christ I gotta work at eight in the morning. All beneath the sealed lid of Brisbane Valley's orange firmament.

You notice a homeless woman sitting on a bench near the taxi rank. She has a face that's dark and lined in a way that reminds you of volcanic rocks at the sea front. She wears a beanie and long-sleeved shirt. It's got to be at least thirty-eight degrees out. A man stretches across the bench beside her, resting his head on her lap. Absent-mindedly, she runs her fingers through his silvery hair. He stirs. She lays a hand across his forehead and draws him in close to her, 'shhh, shhh,' she whispers. She says something else you can't hear and the man grows still. All the while, her eyes continue to stare out, vacantly, beyond the point where you stand, down the street before her.

You note the flash, the glimmer, the silver sickle beneath her long lashes.

You follow her gaze, out to where the skyline used to be. A dark figure dominates the orange skyline, looming above all the other buildings. You smile a half-hearted smile. There's no light on in the Stefan's Skyneedle tonight. ♦