On Becoming a Housewife
for the First Time at the Age of 41

I learn to cut up a melon, though remain unable to bring a knife to a whole chicken. I save small lizards from the dogs. I find myself on tuckshop duty with my dearest friend; at university we didn’t see this coming. I inspect a snake carcass with the boys at the bus stop and deliver a short safety lecture. I learn more than any woman like me needs to know about slashing paddocks. I watch the school terms march across my body and face. I stand at the sink and cry when the kitchen radio tells me another small child has drowned at sea. I wake with a start – counting loaves of bread in the chest freezer. I inspect a snake carcass with the boys and deliver a short safety lecture. I learn more than any woman like me needs to know about slashing paddocks. I watch the school terms march across my body and face. I stand at the sink and cry when the kitchen radio tells me another small child has drowned at sea. I wake with a start – counting loaves of bread in the chest freezer. I inspect a snake carcass with the boys and deliver a short safety lecture.

I visit the vet at least once a week; the animals seem to take turns, patiently. I wear gum boots for seven months straight. I picture my husband dying in a car crash; this dark bubble rises out of the mud of me much too frequently. I know the gecko on the veranda is a gift. At the school gate, I learn, the hard way, to avoid the mothers even crazier than me. I smile when I see the old man in town unwrap his every Thursday chocolate heart. Shouting at my five-year-old I want to bang my head against the wall, hard, to teach him the lesson my mother taught me. I stop myself. But even so, my punishment comes later. I cannot believe it is up to me to keep this baby alive when I am all heart, all naked flailing heart: no skin, no ribs, just this. Everyone, please, avert your eyes! I cope by doing more exercise.

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