

Nella stood by the creek and waited. Blue sky above and thistles below that reached her knees, she knew the swallows returned in the second week of spring.

Nella was fifteen and each September, she came here. No one knew about her vigil and she held it private inside her like a thing that might die if it were to flee into the open.

Ghosts, fairies, spirits might visit the creek, but nothing was as special as the swallows: strong, fragile, bursting from the sky in that second week of spring just as their ancestors had for thousands of years. What was it that it made her feel? It was something . . . something like belief, like everything in every other part of the world, of her world, would be all right if she could just witness the swallows.

‘Please come home,’ she whispered to the darkening sky, and she was sure the birds had heard her. ‘Please come back.’ And then she stepped away, one damp shoe and then the other, and climbed the track that led from the creek.

