

MEDIA RELEASE

SALT CITY RUNAWAY

by Gillian O'Shaughnessy

'A chorus of tiny stabs whose sly work is done before the wounds even register. The cumulative impact is startling.' —Tim Winton

The Hype

- *Salt City Runaway* redefines what short fiction can do—compressing emotional and narrative depth into lightning flashes of language.
- As a former ABC journalist and broadcaster, Gillian's background in storytelling informs precise and evocative prose.
- Her award-winning flash fiction has gained international recognition across the UK, US, and Australia.
- Captures the unique landscapes of Western Australia—Fremantle's 1970s counterculture, the red dust of the Goldfields and the shores of the South West and Great Southern.

The Book

Helen Garner moves into a letterbox. Dead bats rain from the sky. A woman offers Lou Reed her last cigarette at a suburban bus stop. In fifty piercing stories, *Salt City Runaway* introduces a cast of unforgettable characters who disrupt and delight.

From Western Australia's port city of Fremantle, to its red-dusted Goldfields and wave-washed South West, women and girls fight for recognition and solace. Slippery, complicated, tender and broken, they carry their humanity in vivid, strange worlds.

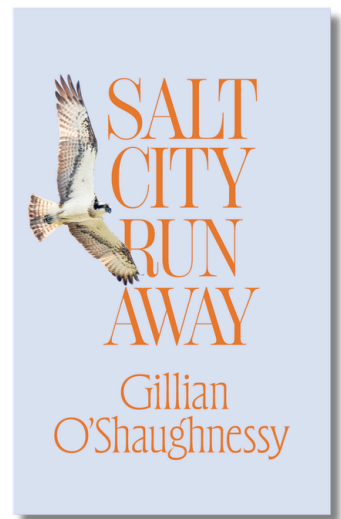
Salt City Runaway is a luminous debut that reveals beauty and wonder in the smallest of stories. It is a masterclass in flash fiction.

The Author

Gillian O'Shaughnessy is Australia's most celebrated flash fiction writer and a highly respected journalist and broadcaster. Her work has appeared in the Best Small Fictions anthologies (2023–2025) and has won international prizes. A former ABC journalist and broadcaster, she has spent three decades interviewing some of the world's most prominent authors and thinkers. Gillian is a sub-editor at *SmokeLong Quarterly*, teaches masterclasses in flash fiction, and is serving as a 2026 Stella Prize judge. Drawing from a lifetime of storytelling — from radio to stage to page — *Salt City Runaway* is Gillian's first book.

'An exhilarating read ... that will take your breath away. I have felt punched in the gut, lifted aloft and dazzled by the uncanny. Gillian O'Shaughnessy beautifully illustrates the adage that less is indeed more.'

—Pip Williams, author of *The Dictionary of Lost Words* and *The Bookbinder of Jericho*



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Talking Points

- **These stories are selections from the best of Gillian's flash fiction:** The book was five years in the making. Many of the stories have won prizes in the USA and the UK and have been selected by industry experts as among the best examples of flash fiction in the world.
- **The personal meets the fictional:** Many of the fictional stories mine memories of Gillian's own life growing up on the South West coast, spending holidays roaming sheep farms and pubs in the Goldfields, and living in Fremantle when the port city was predominantly working-class, with an abattoir, hippies, Orange people and great music.
- **A love letter to Western Australia and Fremantle:** Gillian's love for the landscapes and wild creatures of WA, the South West, the Goldfields and Great Southern sings through these stories. In particular, Fremantle, well before it was gentrified and where she has lived for over 50 years, is embedded in her surreal and unforgettable tiny fictions.
- **Gillian's ABC days:** After attending drama school at John Curtin College of the Arts, Gillian's early ambitions saw her pursuing a career in acting, but she found herself accidentally behind a radio microphone. During her 25-year career in broadcasting, she has interviewed some of the world's most prominent writers and artists, including Hilary Mantel, Ian McKellan, Taika Waititi, Ralph Fiennes, Jane Fonda, John Cleese and many others.
- **Gillian's path to publishing:** Gillian's first fiction wasn't published until she was 53. As a huge reader of short fiction by writers including Lydia Davis and Virginia Woolf, she was introduced to flash fiction during Covid and hasn't stopped since. Her stories have been published in Australia, New Zealand, South-East Asia, the UK and the USA. She works for *SmokeLong Quarterly*, the oldest flash fiction journal in the world and she teaches classes online and in person.
- **What is flash fiction anyway?** It's a very intense short-short story, usually around 1,000 words but it can be as short as the infamous six-word 'For sale: baby shoes, never worn' attributed (questionably) to Ernest Hemingway. Flash fiction is a term invented in the 90s but short fiction is as old as storytelling itself.
- **Are the stories led by character or landscapes?** Both. WA landscapes provide atmosphere: giant karri trees and paperbarks, thundering surf, salt lakes, the cracks and chaos of port cities, red dirt and gold dust. Gillian allows characters, predominately female children and teenagers, to tell their story and when they're done, the story ends. Gillian is an avid adherent to what writers Mary Oliver and Helen Garner describe simply as 'paying attention'.