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TEXT prose

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On the Obfuscations of Language

Grandma taught me vocabulary. She arranged the scrabble tiles in a neat constellation across the table, carefully. Ensuring no letters were revealed prematurely. No peeking. Tiles belly-down, she'd say, pressing the pearly squares into the glossed timber. Don't you even think about touching them, my dear, I can see you contemplating it. Her disciplinary phrases were always followed by an endearment. Your hands are filthy, my dear. She exhaled in sharp drafts of exhaustion. The world is getting heavier, she'd said. It's hard work being a matriarch. Hard work being the boss of this family. Then, she'd scowl at her lack of vowels. Even matriarchs don't get vowels, sometimes. Like Queen Elizabeth I? I asked. Queen Elizabeth I was alive a long time before scrabble, my dear. Your humble grandmother invented scrabble back in the 1930s. That's why I am so good at this game. But Queen Elizabeth I married England and never got vowels, I said. Anyway, who do you think you will marry now Grandpa's gone? A country or another person? That's a different type of vowel, she said, and I am not in a hurry to marry anyone. I am an *independent woman*, she warned. From her intonation I knew this was something to be feared. Then, she'd continued, The English language is fraught with complications, as she rearranged her tiles. What is marriage about, if it's not about vowels then? It's about *winning*, she said, as her eyes focused into slits behind her oversized glasses. She peered down over her small populace of letters. What am I going to do with this ghastly assortment

of tiles? she asked. You should probably know what to do grandma, as you invented scrabble, I said, as I noticed she had a special inflection for children. A certain way of animating the words. They were charades in the beginning. Their delivery tempered with meanings and obfuscations.

Georgia is a teacher and a PhD candidate in the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Creative Writing Program. She holds a BA English Literature with a first-class Honours in Creative Writing also from UNSW. In 2018, her creative non-fiction novella, Holocene, was shortlisted and then highly commended for the Scribe Nonfiction Literary Prize. Alongside her research, teaching and creative practice, Georgia works as a literary critic for the Historical Novels Review.