All Roads Lead to Bombala

We should’ve filled up in Cooma
took a right turn across the yellow Monaro plains
under steel-grey skies, less than 40 ks to Nimmitabel.

When we arrived, there was no pump in town
the tank was on empty, fuel alert beeping.
Locals sprawled on steps outside the pub
confirmed “No petrol in Nimmi”
pointed North-West to Bombala
a long way from Bega.

We had no other option – it was Bombala or bust.
The light slowly dwindling
we had visions of sleeping on the roadside
or walking through shadowy scrub
with a tin can.

With the car in neutral
we were grateful
for every downhill
stretch
arrived in Bombala
with barely a drop in the tank.

We were tired of the road now
and Bega seemed a long way back.
Though we didn’t much like Bombala,
and Bombala didn’t like us,
it had a thriving trucker’s motel
and a receptionist who gave us strangers the evil eye
we almost stayed, but there were queues
as trucks rolled in and the phone rang crazily
telling us there was no room.
We thought we’d seen the end of Bombala
but next morning, as we said goodbye to Bega
headed for the East coast, and Eden,
and even as we headed inland,
west along the Princes Highway
every second turn-off had a green and white sign
with bold letters
proudly displaying the distance to Bombala.

*Deb Matthews-Zott*