

*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  
s t r e t c h  
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*