



University of Iowa

International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work

Fall 10-1-2016

Writing Sample

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Texts. "Ibu & Tufuga", "Mecca", "heart emoticon", "Cutout", "Land's End", "Blue-crowned lorikeet", "Elephant house", "The Florian", "Mile End", and "The Coconut King".

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Recommended Citation

Meredith, Courtney Sina, "Writing Sample" (2016). *International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work*. 556.

https://ir.uiowa.edu/iwp_archive/556

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Courtney Sina MERDITH
Texts

Ibu & Tufuga

Ibu has made pork and prawn noodle soup. Two loaves of white bread, one nutty loaf too. The dough rose with the afternoon sun.

The Tufuga has his sister over from Niu Sila; she wants to see Hogwarts and ghosts. Her mokopuna lives in New York.

I find a book in the den about thieves, Manu is a good girl she makes a platter. We eat cheese and crackers and read.

The Tufuga farewells his sister over from Niu Sila, she won't stay any longer, she misses her mokopuna. She has to pack she has to leave, she is sorry.

The local pub is pink with playful bunting; you have to excuse yourself for walking. In the courtyard everybody smokes.

Ibu brings me a cup of chamomile tea. She dyed her hair brown she looks different. We plan to go to the markets.

If a bird flies inside it means someone has died, the garden is in heat all the bees buzz. Ibu loves to plant new trees.

The Tufuga is worried about October, he is teaching an Italian history paper. The Tufuga does not speak Italian.

A new delicatessen has opened on North Parade. It sells boutique meats and hand made cheese. Ibu goes to town for the day.

Manu makes a huge jug of Pimms; the neighbours come over without their kids. We sit outside under the bright blue sky.

I show Manu my open wound, seeping every day, seeping love. She says my ex was really hot.

Ibu watches us from the garden table. She knows exactly who I might become, if only the house could house my spirits.

**

LOVE
 CULTURE
 OTHER

Mecca

Supper on Durham
 talking backstroke
 getting further spot on the pounamu horizon
 a mate told me how to detail oblivion
 it depends if you are sitting or standing
 it depends on the height of the ship getting further
 gold hair in your eyes Mayfair Kuwait a chopper
 first thing in the morning
 my brother got a bite on the hand (dog) *your family sounds like a film set!* So
 far
 it took three of us and two trolleys to feed the family a curry goes far a
 coleslaw stretches
 his living room is painted by the blood of history (dye-fig/ insatiable bark)

during the voyages of migration
 nobody could harpoon
 the horizon

she was a woman
 heard laughing always
 in the next room under water
 mountainside she was
 never where you were.

heart emoticon

On the phone to Cy from Berlin...

Cy: I tried Egyptian chewing gum at school, there's an Egyptian girl in my class.

Me: What was it like?

Cy: Not very sweet I didn't like it. What have you tried?

Me: I ate frog legs last night and they were tough.

Sven walks into the suite, I owe him five blogs about trees...

Him: Did you ever get around to doing what I asked?

Her: I had an epiphany about leaves.

Him: And what would that be?

Her: Some aren't gold.

So cool sis...

I'm in charge: This will do. I'll set up here.

I'm not in charge: I grew up reading all of your books.

I'm in charge: That's nice dear, hold my coat.

I'm not in charge: Wow, fur soft as clouds.

Thai on Dominion Road...

X: It's only been three months but I'm getting there. I'm ready for someone –

O: Prepared earlier? I mean, a good soul?

X: You're ridiculously beautiful.

O: I've got my shit together.

Cutout

women pray

antique hook

redundant grey. Startling

how many things need attention
and May is only just beginning.

Hunched over artifacts
recorded during summer

sepia taonga
the ruins of Jupiter

utterances boxed

up. Into the head of the eel

gone to count rain capes
with the cold sun

riding shot gun.

Land's End

The Ks are high, the Ks are low
but the seats are uncomfortable
oh spaghetti, couldn't have that:
he's Arabian on the hustle
trying to make ends meet.
I wrap a hand around, both ways,
could the dog fit – and the shine:
would they laugh me out of Run Club?

Is this really the best price in the city
the best price in New Zealand in fact?
He mutters, hosing down the silver hole,
black hole really, money guzzler.

May as well open my window,
push out the French doors, throw
everything I saved to live off
only to come to a head, land's end.

Unfair, whatever you're saving
can't be a lifelong raft, life insurance.
I made an enquiry, but I'll never know
twirling in the hot earth ... Presume
whoever I chose knows what colour
brings out my eyes

then again, they'll be closed ...

He rings an hour later says, thick accent,
and it's hurting his throat all the way:
a hundred dollars off my dear

because you know, he's made a loss
and I must've looked around of course -
made a point of searching
similar creatures, adequate plots ...

Had I not imagined
having to compromise
one day, finally?

Silence, awkward pause.
God I spent hours thinking about this moment
there's a history on my Mac to prove it
so I can't go forgetting what I've lost.

Petrol is cheap but house prices are soaring.
You have to pay your respects to the roof
over your head, before it spins
into the sun.

Blue-crowned lorikeet

can do no wrong she
eats the lung of the niu she
nests in the holes of trees
orange bill yellow eye
purple thighs opaque abdomen
red throat she only exists
in the mind of a little rain
cannot reference an indeterminate
change no she inhabits heat
it has always been, the flowering
point of yonder. She eats
nectar pollen small eyes
including wild hibiscus. She
came to me when I was within reach
most stay tame most stay tame.

Elephant House

I lived in the elephant house
slept on the floor
fairy tale turret

/

Fell into a sales job
right by the palace
every lunch time
cried into my sandwich

/

Pete
bald
knifed in the hand
Jackie whose sister Suzy
fell in love with a bad man
he used to touch himself on trains
relieve himself in front of kids
they called him
Hannibal

/

Stuck in the Lord's shadow
statehouse moon beams
courtesy of the full wall mirror
multiplying every belonging

/

Looking for coke and a good time
but it's shirts off now and no more faces
dark side of the Waterloo moon

/

Can you see yourself there on the beach?
Cold beer in hand and a hot economy
surrounded by jobs and bones and blondes?

/

Hannibal closes the door behind him
it's nice to meet a sweet girl

/

Puts the kettle on like an average bear
makes me a sandwich full of tears

The Florian

Uli asks Franziska to dinner
with me Marley losua and Peta

Odille is making dresses in the corner
dark cloud thread
shadow for the boy
bare backed toying with a viola
where is the dinner?

After German Hamlet in the rain
After banana curry in the tent
Somewhere on Kantstrasse

yellow finn
Canadian lobster
duck liver/ Florian

of Kreuzberg of Freedom
have you seen him? Sketching a path through the rain.

Mile End

We go past some houses in the night
it's a blue night no rain houses sway
past the train it's a clear night

one stood footballer
covered in the field around the corner
eyeballs me

Piccadilly
open night. Allow the light
should light arrive.

Kings Cross pancreas
acute
boy spit
part word anthem:
step out with me Lucy?

He calls it the perfect storm. Imagine the world in 80 years.
Please ask questions. Peter mentions a problem
do you want to know what the challenge is? Polish beauty
asleep on the table beside me
eats her chestnut curls.

I pour a little orange
do my best to believe
in Matt with his lazy tongue
circling wide oyster
aue he can't flick it fast enough! Contraception is not un-Islamic. A woman controls her own
body
these days.

Rhythm method. Pull out.

**

The Coconut King

The coconut king sends me a text/ he wants to meet up and give me some coconut oil/ it isn't cold pressed/ his mother made it the traditional way in the sun/ he's from a different island where the women are in charge/ their men wait on them at home like wives in the west/ Helena says it's fine to have a holiday fling/ even if it's with the blackest guy on the island/ my aunty says to keep away from him/ he's a heart breaker/ she should know/ always getting caught on rusty men like rusty nails/ smartening up in a blue floral dress/ she puts on dangly earrings and does a twirl/ pretty as a picture/ I watch her leave the house smiling/ promise not to see the black animal/ lying through my teeth.

Helena's scooter works again/ hear it turn into my aunty's drive/ look down at myself in a pink mood singlet/ blushing into red at the end/ wipe passionfruit pulp off my shorts/ stop in the mirror/ turn my neck both ways/ clean and slender/ hair smelling like honey/ skin soft like butter/ take some deep breaths/ watch the black ants march across the bench/ Helena yells out over the spitting engine of the bike/ hurry up and lock the house.

We get to the markets while it's still light/ the coconut king is sitting in a circle with his boys/ they fish and hunt together/ bark at tourists in hotels/ wearing next to nothing/ stamp and wail about the gods/ pull white women up from the audience to dance and dance/ warriors for hire/ call it round the world but it's just round the room/ round and round the same island playing the same songs every Tuesday and Thursday/ he looks up/ sees my face/ jumps to his feet/ tells the boys to shut up/ does his best impression of a gentleman/ pats down the black curls of his chest/ creeping out from under his singlet/ wades towards me/ used to living underwater/ wades through an ocean of women staring/ saying dirty things behind his back/ looks at me like I'm the only girl at the market/ gives me a kiss on the cheek and two containers of white cake/ Helena's eyes go wide/ she grabs them out of my hands/ stalks off to a table with shade/ takes out her phone to text her papa'a boyfriend/ snaps a picture of the cake/ then a picture of her bust/ gleaming behind a sunburst knot.

I walk around the food stalls with the coconut king/ watch his leather skin glistening in the heat/ beads of sweat push their way through his temples/ I let him rest his fingers on my elbow/ let him hold my hand for a second before my steak roll is ready/ we walk to the back of the markets and cuddle by the toilets/ he melts in my arms.

The church took my grandmother's stove/ she signed the house over in her will/ I go to the flat land where she used to live and feel all the hairs on the back of my neck stand up/ she was a quiet woman/ always by the window lathering coconut oil into her hair/ combing until the white teeth turned red/ pleased when her scalp was raw/ my aunty says not to think about it/ the missionaries gave her something to believe in/ we drive to a garden on the other side of the island to pick frangipani for guests arriving from America/ more old white men to line the pockets of the island/ my aunty asks why I keep smiling/ tell her the truth/ I'm still drunk from the night before/ when we get to the house there's only babies rolling around on the deck and two dogs in chains/ the mum and dad aren't home/ we fill up a plastic bag with flowers and take off.

The darkest moments of the island unfurl in daylight/ geckos cluck/ fat with spirits/ in the car we talk about moves/ I want to inhabit his body/ how to move inside the coconut king like water moves inside the land/ Helena talks me through her wardrobe/ I can borrow whatever/ I'm going home in three days anyway/ her papa'a boyfriend thinks I can do better/ someone with a brain/ we smile at each other while my aunty drives/ his blonde eyelashes shine/ Helena's riding shotgun and making a long list/ a shopping list/ a beautification list/ not that the coconut king will notice/ my aunty's given up/ I'm old

enough/ girls my age make up their own minds/ their own beds/ their own faces with clouds of powder.

Studying the coconut king one night drinking cheap vodka/ dark and wide like a massive shadow with paws/ after the vodka he kisses my hand and leads me down the beach far away from Helena and her papa'a boyfriend/ closer to the edge of trees and rocks/ as clouds cover the moon/ the coconut king takes off his shirt/ lays it across the wet sand/ he takes off his pants/ kneels down on his crumpled clothes with both hands reaching out to me/ come and dance he says/ the waves are playing our song.

Sheets on the line hold their breath/ show off sharp ribs/ hold hands breathe out/ everything is moving on the island/ old faces reappear/ asking the same old questions/ why did they send you away/ were you a bad girl/ is that why your tongue is a dead fish/ did you kill your own tongue/ spitting city trash/ sitting unconscious in your own skin/ far away from your people/ sitting on the surface/ is it like being covered in plastic/ they ask over and over again/ flicking their dusty tongues between English and gibberish.

Helena lies in the sun/ waits for her glass to be filled/ I pour pinot noir/ her papa'a boyfriend has turned to gold/ he sits down on the grass beside us/ rolls a joint/ they've got a cat who likes to fight/ maybe they'll get married and stay on the rock/ teach the cat to love the heat/ Helena wants to study long distance/ do it on the internet in town once a week/ they've both gotten used to seeing the dead/ things go on here/ the elders are healing people by ending their lives/ moving their souls into animals/ that explains red-eyed roosters and goats looking for privacy/ why the wild pigs cry like boys/ they say that's what happened to my grandmother/ the church swapped her for a dog/ took all of her land/ sold all of her jewels/ Helena's papa'a boyfriend jokes about me and the coconut king/ does he seem like a normal man/ how can I not feel what he is/ sleeping with a mountain ghost.

The coconut king turns up on his motorbike/ I kiss Helena on the forehead/ wave goodbye to her papa'a boyfriend/ think about staying away for a while/ send my aunty a text that I won't be home tonight/ she replies with a smiley face.

We curve our way around the land/ climbing high above the sea/ pull up in front of a small house/ he says it belongs to him/ inside there's no electronics only coconut shells and soft fabrics/ a single bed neatly made/ boxes of beer and posters of wrestlers on the walls/ I hitch up my long skirt/ fan my face with a car magazine beside the bed.

The coconut king sits on the floor in front of me/ rests his hands in his lap/ goes soft around the mouth/ everyone wants me to stay/ goes soft around the eyes/ tells me to cancel my flights/ it's easy he knows the number/ his brother will answer/ my aunty will get a refund/ I can stay with him on the mountain/ my tongue won't be a dead fish/ he knows where they've taken my grandmother's stove/ we'll make them pay.

He says all of these things with the back of his head bleeding handfuls and handfuls of blood/ the room fills with small red waves/ staining the heavy flowers of my long skirt.
