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Writing Sample

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Writing Sample

Last Born

I am the last born
I move through the crowd with my shiny red wheels
I bring with me large animals and flaming spikes in cages
I am the last born and I know who I want to vote for
I know the identity of the figure in black
Low prices are written all over my face
I am the last born and I have a long following
Everything and everyone is my elder
I move through the relatives in my green leaves
I eat canoes and drink inlets
I have a beard and a small fat crab inside my shell
I am the last born the pōtiki the teina
Everything breaks its back over me but there are
Many ways to build from scratch and in spite of the fact
That every fourth corner of the land has been walked
Over I make everything ready, being the last born
I am desired at each event, to lay down the
Cow leather, to direct people to the location of
The demons, the devils in the tarmac
We all bite something for a living
I know not to rave and shout when I reach these places
I bring children with me, just the right number
Of pumpkins and I sing completely out of tune
Buying up all the land around with my lucky sand dollars
Liver

I hang out the washing at night.

Each peg squeaks into place.

You, in the kitchen light, warming my back.

I'm worrying again about your liver

as if it helps.
I feel around

on you—which side is it? How big?

You have nightmares and kick me in your sleep.

Sometimes
I kick you back.
What the Destination Has to Offer

Like trees, there are rings
in the small headbones of an eel
we count the rings to find the age.

Each bone too small for tweezers
my cousin plucks one up
stuck to a bead of silicon

on the end of a wire.
He is putting his bones under the microscope.
He can tell you what they’ve been eating.

They go to Sāmoa to breed
he tells me, probably Sāmoa
or somewhere with water

so deep it crushes the sperm
and eggs from their bodies.
They die then

and the tiny glass eels
make their way from Sāmoa
back to the same river

in the Horowhenua.
Salt, fresh, salt, he says.
The opposite of salmon.

*

I threw out the clock
the rubbish is ticking.
On television

people are making alarming discoveries
about the secret online lives
of their loved ones, the daughter

and the cyanide, the no-reason.
Our dishes smell of flyspray
I wash them while the flies circle
the same flies that have flown
the rooms of this house
in formation for weeks
two zizzing pairs.
Or perhaps they are
different flies every day
replenishing themselves
away from my gaze
middle-aged state servants
in a timeshare, bored
with what the destination has to offer
the hydroslide
the boardwalk
through the mangroves
bitching at each other
they can’t settle
they should have gone
to Sāmoa instead.
The Fossils

I feel
says the woman on the bus
like I've swallowed a branch

is this a new flu?
The bus-driver says
I feel like I've swallowed a hurry.

Well I
says the depot manager
I feel like I've swallowed

a large white brick
state house
the brick isn't real
page 144

it's a kind of cladding
at one corner a nest
of spiders is building.

We the shareholders
feel like we've swallowed a bus
no—several buses

trolley buses or trams that depend
on electricity for their volition
and wave sparking antennae

at thick wires criss-crossing our city
making every suburb and hotspot
accessible without resort

to the motorcar
and its archaic fossil-fuel-burning
technologies.

We are a branch
say the fossils
of your family.
To my Mother's Surgeon

I dreamed you were taking photographs of me
concrete, elect, manipulating my tape-ribbon
in a room filled with light and sound

events, a bombardment. I was wearing
brown brushed satin, my eardrum
a hammer and anvil, you were
taking them from behind, catching
the smallest bones: the ossicles
the tympanic line of my jawbone, the flick

of vestibular canals, liquid balance
of eyelashes but not the eye. Outside,
decisions and idiophones

aerophones were being made, floating on the
threshold. Steam inhaled now waving
back at me from the water, washing to be done

and the dry wish of paper-stacking.
There were nests of musicians
and among them a pile of quiet

truck-horns. I broke off a letter in mid-sentence
to say: isn't that part of you in front of us?
Sir, Mister, I seek the direct

hope you were never given as a child
the buttery contact of fingers
and the quality of sleep I very much

hope you enjoy on the 25th
or 16th of the month the night before
the morning of the anaesthetic. Pull up

a stool, Mr Cochlear, finger its red brocade.
Pump the pedals—the thin black, the wider white ones.
Breathe in the polish. Play her precious keys.
The Airshow

the airshow
It was green, piano music
should have been there or a harpsichord.
A friend with a good strong core.
I was keeping my head down but she found me anyway.
Found out by my stripes.

My mother’s face was dark blue
with a darker blue band at the horizon.
The green was the new-mown school field.
It was the year they arrested those kaumātua
and took them home instead of jail.
It was the year of the Fun Run.

I was piling clippings into an aerial view of a house –
roofless rooms, lines of damp cuttings at right angles.
The sky was pinky-red with dust flecks or insects floating.
It was the year of the Airshow, when the guy
got the whole thing on film, the thing that
nearly happened but they turned on a dime.

Green on green, soft at the corners.
A pile for a chair. I walked through grass rooms.
You should have been there, you’re a good friend.
The stripes were sunburn marks
a halter bow, white on tan.
They went via the station and later
one of those kuia asked the policeman
for her fingerprints back.

My mother was a shape approaching through insects.
All good friends go, their houses get bought by parents
of a girl who says look at the clouds moving over the moon
they should block it out but they don’t then she tries
to kiss you.

I rolled my face into my clippings
pillow and prayed to die before I waked.
My mother wore a dark blue outfit with a light blue chiffon scarf.
In two weeks we’re leaving, Dad’s staying here.
It was the year I learned about diphthongs.
The year the camping table locked at the knees.

The man in the movie said the Horse Nation
lost relatives too, at Wounded Knee.
It was the year I found out how they fleece sheep
fists between skin and beast, pushing hard.
The year I found out they keep the fuel in the plane’s tyres.
In two weeks we’re flying to Nelson.

I pray to the patron saint of sleeping late.
My mother’s scarf blows in the same direction as the windsock.
My hair’s in my mouth for the photo.
He puts us out of his car, his engine whines
he pulls out of the carpark just in time.
The sun or the aviation fuel makes the runway look like water.
Talk

make any sound
hiss or bubble
like brick in the hearth

like it was a habit
tell them all about
the mountain

the musical instrument
played with the nose
how we press our noses

to the stone
once for humans
twice for dogs

or is it twice for humans?
chisel out
a cave for us

to sleep in
using your hands
and no recitations

no rites belched out
no arts is there
a word for that?

a stream disappears
underground
then hatches

from the trunks of trees
the yellow quivers
of the kōwhai
Whenua*
(for Ariki Noel Riley, born 21/09/2003)

Some other year on this day
I paid forty-five thousand dinar
for Season Fruit and when it came
it was an apple on a plate.
A beautiful apple, though

red, on a yellow plate
it was thoroughly washed
crisp, in season, utterly
I walked beside the Adriatic
a sea without tides

stood on Glorietta Hill
eating local pears, radishes
Laughing Cow Cheese.
On the stationary train
Mario told me he would be a captain

that his country has six republics.
In the Bible my poppa gave me
this passage is marked in pencil
\[ may \ the \ earth \ swarm \ with \ you \]
\[ kia \ rea \ ki \ runga \ ki \ te \ whenua \]

now here it is, in this sac –
we hold it up, each has a turn
our ears sizzle, we make
pronouns with our mouths, it hangs
heavy as a beehive from our fingers.

*whenua – land, earth, placenta