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Poems

Briar Wood

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Poems

Abstract

SEA WALL and KIRIKAU

Briar Wood

SEA WALL

We let our fingers meet
swimming in Palolo Deep
the rest of us got together later —
after Margrey Ta's bar
where the Kiwi women's netball team
cheered the Samoan men's dance routine
among the roots of a banyan tree
with Cindy the dazzling fa'afafine
shaking her tail feathers.
Later the bus radio played Odyssey —
Going Back to My Roots.
Love, sweet as the Mika Sisters.
As the massive ships slipped away
we stood hand in hand at the cool sea wall.

KIRIKAU

There were screen memories,
under the now sealed surface
following the Wanganui River
by a twisted road, past slips,
that many times have blocked
the path, running on empty,
across a high bridge, and into
whatever went before. I expected
dry ice and dramatic driving, not this
pleasantly tripping river, soft poplars
and the navigable road. I'd heard
tall stories of mail drops, the river
swollen to impassable for weeks,
long drives to prohibition-style drinking
parties, my mother (who loved
Elliot Ness), reluctantly transported
to hospital, waiting impatiently
as I became way overdue. Her only
bunch of flowers brought by Peter
Singh, arriving late one night after
an interminable drive from Auckland
only to be frowned on by a matron.
'But you've got to let me in!'
he persuaded 'I'm her best man'.
The schoolhouse filled with sunlight
and a variety of mobiles annotated
with children's tentative hands. Was it
this or the building at Te Poi that's now
a hay barn where the everyday miracle
of children grew? After, we stopped for
tea at Taumarunui, my birth town
of which I am inexplicably proud,
including the café with fine china
and postcard paintings of mountains
viewed from close to the Desert Road.
The thick railway cups have gone
but the maternity hospital's there.
At many a country town, I've hitched
this Calamity Jane complex to a railing
searching for something like turangawaewae.