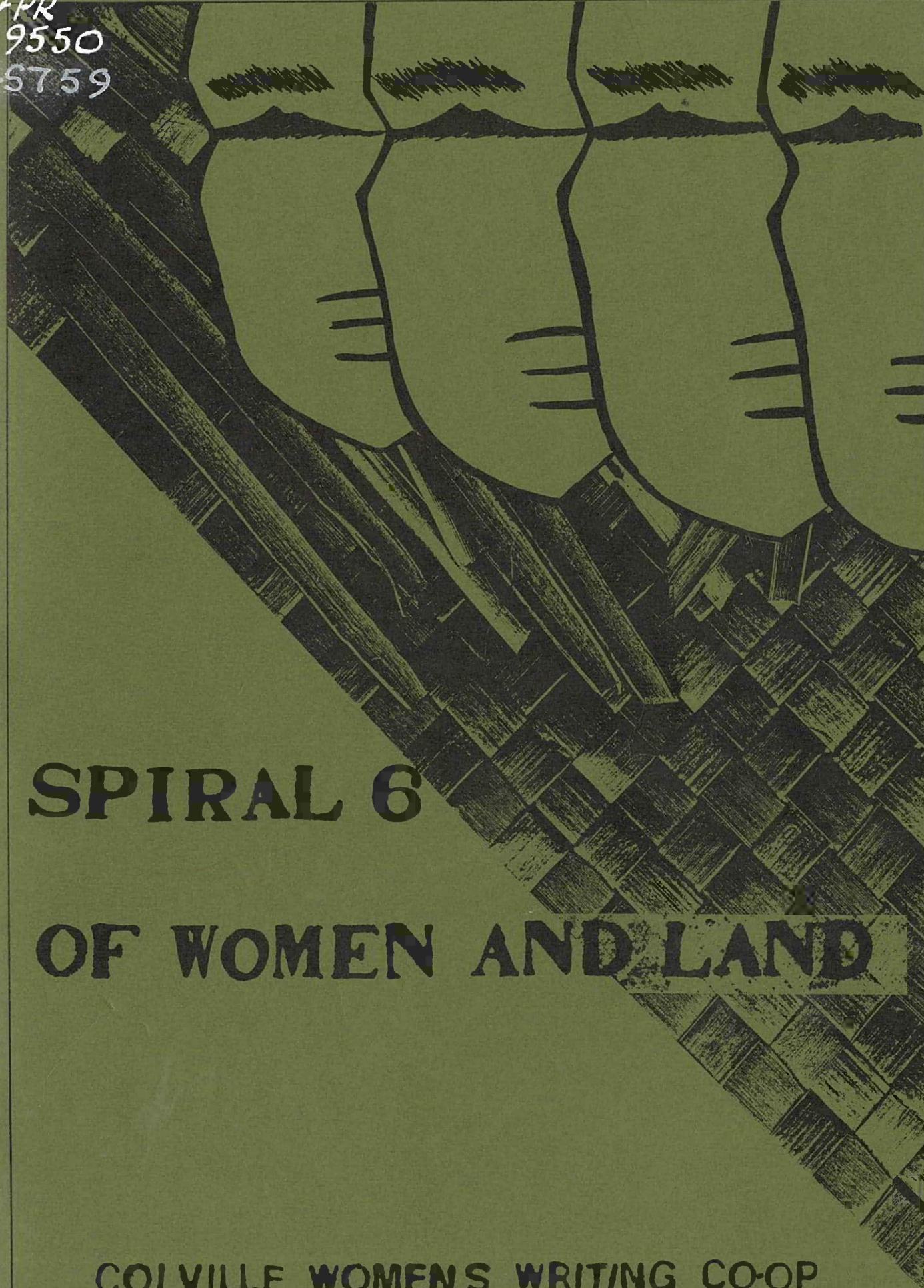


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SPIRAL 6
OF WOMEN AND LAND

COLVILLE WOMEN'S WRITING CO-OP

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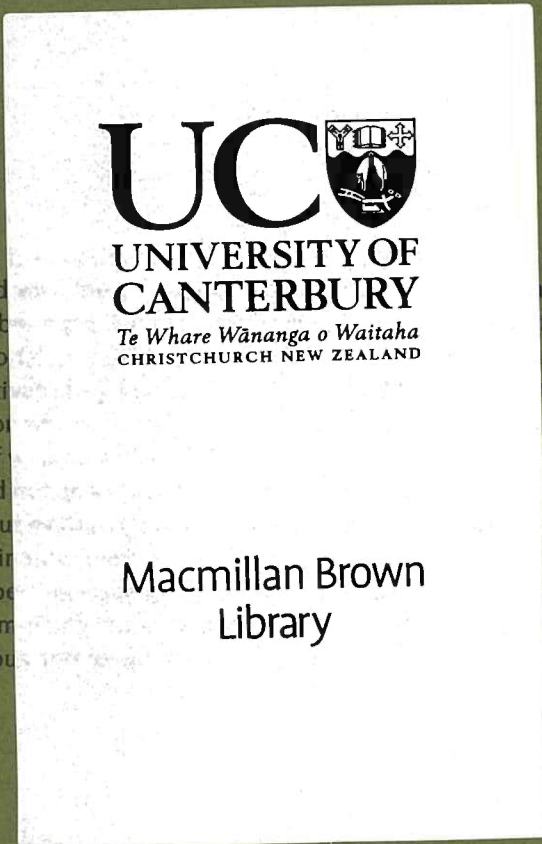
Of Women and Land.

THE COLVILLE WOMEN'S WRITING CO-OP is a small co-operative enterprise of four women, Catherine Delahunty, Lora Mountjoy, Julie Sargisson and Chrise Tao. Our chief purpose is not to publish our work but to support each other in the practise and enjoyment of it.

We all live in Colville, a small community in the far north of the Coromandel Peninsula. Our daily lives are bounded by the demands of children, economic pressure, the weather, unreliable cars and roads. Some of us go out to work, some of us have pre-school children. Much of our time is taken with gardens, woodchopping — all the daily tasks of country living. We meet when we can.

When we meet, we share and discuss what we have written. The group forces us out of day-to-day pre occupations, forces us to write, think, criticize. Through this process we are learning to communicate our experience to others and to see our lives, our ordinary lives, not as society tells us to see them, but as we experience them as we feel, deep down.

It is a pleasure to be together with a creative focus, giving weight to women's experience.



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Thanks to Kay, Jane Connor, Candice, John, Richard, Graeme, Paul, Sand, Johnny, Fran, Jim Malloy, Jan, Marion Evans, the women at Broadsheet, not forgetting Geraldine Smithywoman, Douglas and the kids.

- COLVILLE Flat valley steep hills magic outcrops
- COLVILLE Blue bay dappled mudflats skiddy paths and rain
- COLVILLE The store people in black aprons bulk beans & chewing gum
- COLVILLE Alternative alternative what is the alternative?
- WOMEN'S Womb-in not fee male not for male of us for us
- WOMEN'S Each alone not owned or owning together power unfolding
- WOMEN'S Of wit of wisdom of weariness, courage and care
- WOMEN'S Just how we are strong together each her own
- WRITING Words on paper pens typing print
- WRITING From mind to mind consciousness expanding meshing
- WRITING Strong silences rustle of pen on paper held breath
- WRITING When you can on backs of envelopes get it down aah
- CO-OP erative co-operative co-operative co-operative co-op
- CO-OP Together with each other sharing opening embracing
- CO-OP Extension of me-the-writer we-the-writers
- CO-OP Four women in a circle piles of paper tea



Julie



Catherine



Chrise



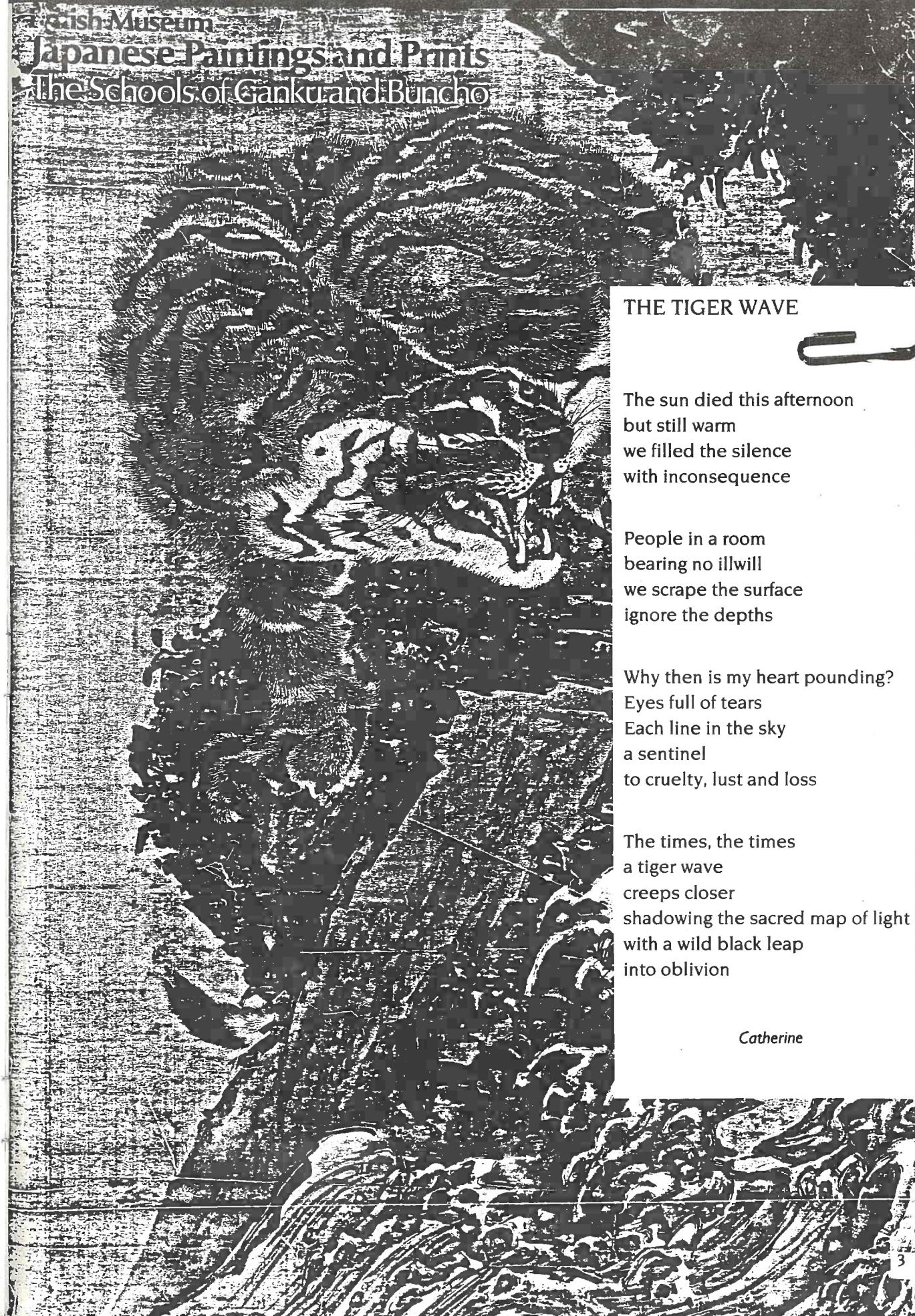
Lora

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British Museum Japanese Paintings and Prints The Schools of Ganku and Buncho



THE TIGER WAVE

The sun died this afternoon
but still warm
we filled the silence
with in consequence

People in a room
bearing no illwill
we scrape the surface
ignore the depths

Why then is my heart pounding?
Eyes full of tears
Each line in the sky
a sentinel
to cruelty, lust and loss

The times, the times
a tiger wave
creeps closer
shadowing the sacred map of light
with a wild black leap
into oblivion

Catherine

Pa Hill

Lora Mountjoy

"I'M A LITTLE BIT DRUNK, you're a little bit....". The song on the radio was too close to the mark. Pete kicked out with a pointed boot and the small black rectangle toppled over and lay silent.

"Musta knocked the knob," he thought dispassionately. "That little fall wasn't hard enough to stuff it." The right arm came up in an automatic arc and the head tilted slightly. Bottle to lips. Glug, swig. Down went the arm again.

On the plain below the late sun caught a window, turning it to sudden fire. Inside, curved bum in the air like a sleek brown cat mother, a woman played with her child, who lay on its back, reaching up, pulling the tit and sucking.

"You're like a savage with that child, Miria. How will it get on at Playcentre? Its father worried past, not sure if these two wild animals belonged to him. The child, yes, it has his eyes. They must see some of his world. But the mother? Only one way to know her. He extended a tentative finger, then with a breath of courage ran a practiced trill up her inside leg. She shuddered down one side only, a twitching wave, and shook her head. Suffused with desire he humped the laundry into the wash-house while the babe sucked and twiddled. The dark mound of Pa Hill filled the wash-house window.

However much Pete turned the knob, he couldn't get the radio to work and somehow it was abandoned, staying after the round red lights of his Falcon had disappeared down the road.

Over the years the hill had accepted many strange gifts. Miria's last bra, discarded five years ago, decomposed among some mingi-mingi here, and now the shiny box of the radio became odd neighbour to a jagged lava lump. Broken glass nestled among the smaller stones, half burying the whitened remains of a single enigmatic boot.

Not all the flanks of the hill were naked lava though. There were trees, short scrubby ones, sheltering pockets of leaf mould and moss, and the round brown crest wore a stubble of lawn and sported a memorial plinth.

Soon after sunset the heavy blanket of night settled down, covering the mound and the bodies of two people, who lay in one of its folds. To herself, Miria called her companion the Poet, though in fact she knew very little of him. A stranger almost, his nightly runs seemed destined from the first to merge with hers. She had seen his blue eyes flicker with unknown pain as they searched her face. Now she felt the hot wind of his breath on her ear as he spoke.

"You flow into the earth, you are part of a previous me, you take me to the essence." His tone was intense, insistent, but she hardly seemed to hear his words, which trickled past her like the sand which ran down from languid finger to settle by her armpit. His groping fingers met the sand, but missed the taut-spring tension of her body. "Wise sand, to rest in Miria's cove" he murmured, then rolled onto his back, opening eyes wide to the deep starry sky, gliding with the earth on its slow spin solar orbit. Senses sharpened by Miria's nearness, he felt the hairs of his body streaming in the breezes of space.

But when Pa Hill grounded him finally, when a sharp fragment under his naked thigh brought him to earth, she had gone. For a wild moment he imagined her body dispersing among the elements, atoms, molecules reshaping, becoming sand form then formless sand. The image crumpled at the sound of an approaching vehicle.

They had come to the end of the road. Jan got out and leaned against the bonnet. Pete stood by the door and with one hand reached for her crotch. When she squirmed and tilted out of reach he leaned the other hand back through the window, making contact this time with a bottle which he opened and raised to waiting lips. Wiping the mouth with a sleeve, he offered it to her.

"Like a drink?"

"Yeah." The bottle didn't seem so much part of her as of him, but she drank thirstily and passed it back. It moved between them, the cold wet shape a familiar friend on this strange hillside. "A nice drop." She felt better and their hands touched, his fingers started creeping.

"If I was her match, I'd find her." The poet looked over the rough stones which formed the lip of their sandy bed and could see nothing but black, and a hint of prickly bushes. "I'd find her by scent, follow her trail."

Sudden light, a sweeping headlight beam from the road below, jerked a tangle of black lines into relief. Maybe there was a female form in it somewhere too, but the blackness swallowed the image too soon to be sure. He sniffed once, tentatively, then again deeply. Petrol fumes mingled with mown grass and the dry ageless smell of the rock.

Perhaps it was because of the void moon that the child was restless. Its father sat beside the bed, soothing hand stroking the fragile back, while his mind wandered down stormy pathways.

"She's gone running. Nothing wrong with that, if she's alone. But she's not. She's taken him up there, I know it. She's taken some stranger to our place. He's there, spouting fancy words, touching her."

A wave of anger, an urge to destroy swept through him, so strong his massaging fingers tensed and pressed too hard. A half gasp, half cry from the child shocked him, and he reined in his runaway thoughts, replacing them with a sort of mantra, "Rest well, baby, rest well. Daddy loves you, sleep my sweet, sleep sweetly now, hush now..." Only an odd star broke through the drifting clouds to mark the mass of Pa Hill from the sky.

Not all the offerings of the mound were recent. Once, long before cars broke the silence of the nights, a woman came, a silent stranger, stealthy but proud. She picked three stones, and when she had worried them out of the earth it made a pit. She squatted over it and as the bright full moon looked down through forest trees, she watched her own gleaming blood stream and soak the ground. Even when the menses eased she stayed, settled seriously on her haunches, being with the night. Then, replacing the stones, walked on.

Jan had loosened up a bit now, and Pete was able to guide her away from the car, past the granite plinth to a gentle bank, hidden from the road.

"Still some beer left."

"Thanks." She fretted a little still, scanning a mental checklist. "Grass not too cold, musn't catch... well... could catch anything, clean underwear, remember mother said..."

Look, there's three stars in a row." His loud voice broke her chain of anxiety and she answered automatically,

"Yes, that's the Pot."

"Is that a fact? Can't see much tonight. More a night for feeling, ay?"

From his rocky perch the poet could hear every word, shuddering at the grossness. Who would name a star 'The Pot'? What would it be called by someone who ate berries, roasted

lizards in leaves on hot coals? Miria seemed part of such a world, hard to imagine her with pots, forks, spoons, on a lounge suite from the Farmers. No certainly not there, but where? And where was she right now? As he looked up clouds mowed down the last daisy patch of stars. He had moved to the lip of the cleft, but now that the darkness was even more intense he felt stranded and started to inch back to the hollow, to the illusion of being somewhere. She had brought him here, surely she would return for him? But even as he thought it, he knew it wasn't true, that the part of her which fascinated him was also the part that would abandon him, on a whim or a change of mood.

Miria lay at the edge of the lawn, head pillowed on the smooth cool back of the radio, rendered invisible by stillness and the black night. Watching a couple do what she had come here to do. So much for the new lover, the poet full of fire for her. He had left her, moved his mind from her body when she was ready to come to him. Let him stargaze, she would be an unnoticed guest at someone else's lovemaking.

Really, it was like birdwatching. The female seemed to be a parrot, creature of sharp shrieks and ruffling feathers. He was another species, hard to identify in the dark, but bent on his goal. When he achieved it, gasping then shouting hoarsely in climax, Miria felt revulsion overtake her unexpectedly. Noiselessly she rolled to face the other way, the sharp weeds and grasses which bordered the lawn stabbing and scratching her oiled body. Then crouching on all fours she picked up one stone, another, then another. Smell of dried blood rose from the earth, she retched and vomit flooded into the hollow.

Back in the cleft now, the Poet could still hear voices.

"There, that wasn't too bad, was it? Wanna smoke?"

"Pete, I saw something move."

"Course yer did, me."

"No, over there, a person I'm sure."

"Rabbit more likely, or wild cat. Or rat."

"Yuk, rat, do you really think so? Let's get back to the car." The voices dribbled on but the poet had stopped listening. Was it really a rat they saw, or Miria? He shuddered too at the thought of a rat, instinctively covered his bare penis and wondered where his clothes were. He had abandoned them so blithely, back in that other time and space, that world she had woven around him. Well he was stuck in this reality now, and would have to find his own way. He tried to see how the land lay, but it was so dark. He had never known before how dark the night could be. Remembering that they had climbed down to get here, he moved uphill now, slowly on hands and knees, feeling his path, peering till it ached behind his eyes. Surely he would soon reach the road. The jagged bushes tore his skin and the rough scoria grazed his knees. Somehow he had to find his clothes. his shorts and sweat-shirt, his new running shoes. Considering the task, he felt both desperate and elated, at last a party to some missed ordeal, some initiation.

Now Pete had the right to cradle one hand between her thighs, while the other rose in its familiar arc.

"Wanna drink?" Yes, Jan did want a drink. It seemed to silence that nagging voice inside her which asked inconvenient questions like why? what for? what's in it for you? Well, she did like the warm touch of him, now nothing more was expected from her for the moment. And he was quite a nice fella really.

He took his hand from her crotch and turned on the ignition, revved up a couple of times, then let the motor idle.

"I did see something move y'know Pete."

"You and your rat."

"It was big."

"Rats can be big, little girl. We go down the dump sometimes, shooting them. Some of them are monsters. Could be that, or a wild cat. Don't worry, I've got my gun here, look." He pulled a rifle from the back seat and leaned it out the window. "Don't worry, I'll protect yer."

She giggled and snuggled up to him, and her thoughts, falling into familiar patterns, idled along with the motor as she gazed blankly through the windscreen. Suddenly they both saw it, the movement, the eyes gleaming down among the scrub. Pete was ready with the gun almost before Jan shrieked.

The loose shift lay against Miria's body as if it had been licked to smoothness, pressed with a damp paw to follow her creases. Only a stray wisp of hair and a scratch on her wrist hinted that she had not spent the entire evening grooming herself.

"I heard a loud noise," he said, handing her a cup of hot milk and honey. "I went outside for some fresh air and I heard... a shot?"

"I heard it too. I think it could have been a backfire. There was an engine running, then that bang, and a minute later a big old car roared past me. I'd just reached the bottom of the hill and was running along the straight. It came up behind me so fast I was scared stiff and jumped into the ditch."

She lifted her arm slightly to show the scratch, then started to lap up the milk. The big chair held her as a hand cradles a peach, and he watched silently, wanting to trust her.

A cold wind whips
through whitened grasses
A mynah bird picks flesh
from the skull of despair
We entombed in our separate winters
cannot reach out
and touch each other.

Julie

Hills stand firm
and seemingly quite rigid
a north east slope
is burned today
a shaven land this is becoming
I'm pleased to look to bush

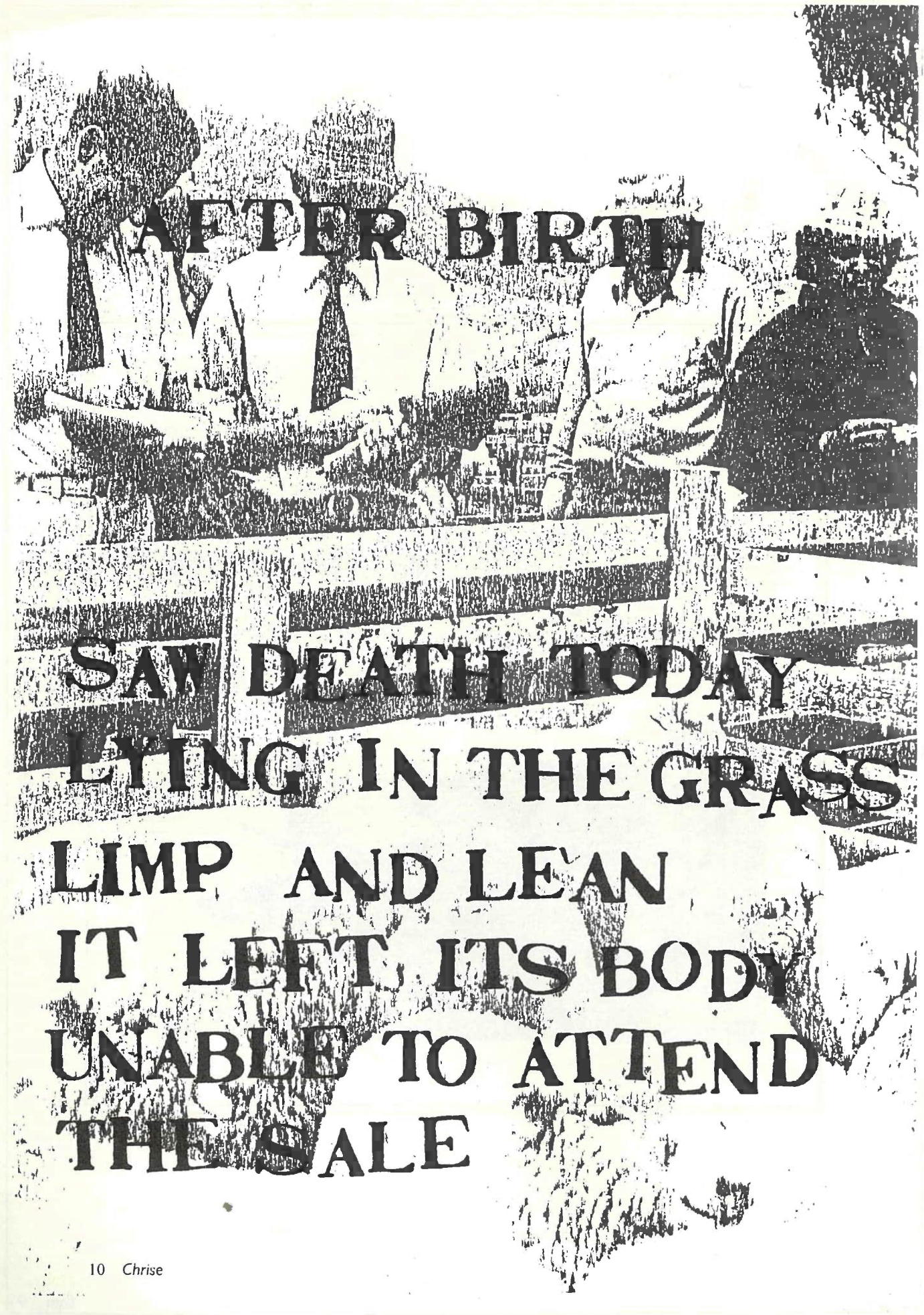
Chrise



WONDER A MOMENT
RIVER SEA OR SKY?
SHIMMERING MANGAHUINI VALLEY
YOUR INCANDESCENT EMBRACE
TAKES ME OUT OF MIND

ITS A WEST WIND
TODAY THE RIVER
IS FLOWING BACKWARDS
ME TOO?





**AFTER BIRTH
SAW DEATH TODAY
LYING IN THE GRASS
LIMP AND LEAN
IT LEFT ITS BODY
UNABLE TO ATTEND
THE SALE**

Main Shear

extract from novel in progress

by Catherine Delahunty

I SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN AWAKE ALL NIGHT when I heard wheels in the drive at Silvia's place. I crept out the door into the fading night and the door of the Toyota Landcruiser was swung open for me by my new employer. He wheel spun in the drive, turned up the Neil Diamond tape and we roared off to the first shearing shed of my life.

"Feeling fit Gina," Zack Davies in his early morning mood, grinning and whistling, slapping his hand on the wheel in time to Wichita Lineman or Cracklin Rosie. I was to know this moment off by heart over miles of rough metal and summer dawns. All I could say was, "I'm okay," or "Only twelve hours to go". I was not used to such pace and bonhomie at this time of the day. Zack drove hell for leather through the dream scenery while I sat in a nervous daze clutching the arm rest, knees gripping the edge of the seat.

On that first morning we crossed the range to the ocean side and drove some five or so miles alongside the white beach with the smooth blue tide coming in, the sun's colour still soft.

"It's going to be a hot one," said Zack Davies, smiling with genuine pleasure at the hot day ahead locked in a tin shed with greasy wool, stinking sheep shit and roaring motors, bent double over 400 recalcitrant sheep.

After opening about four gates we arrived at a large woolshed which sat naked on a hillside overlooking the homestead and the sea. There was a dark blue Falcon with a number of dents in the side pulled up by the steps and a face in shadow looking out a small window further down the shed.

"Dick's always the early bird," said Zack, charging up the steps with his shearing box and the light of battle in his eyes. Once out of the car the air was cool, the clock in the car had said five minutes to five, I stared briefly at the calm tropical world and then hurried into the shed. The stench of sheep hit me in a wave, a motor was groaning in the far corner and beside it Dick the cousin was grinding something on a wheel. The air around him was full of tiny golden sparks. He was taller and thinner than Zack, good looking I supposed. His hair like Zack's was nearly blonde and he had the same full, fleshy features. In Zack's face they conspired to a homely but ingenuous openness. Dick however, whose eyes were bluer, whose lips fuller, was somehow hard and closed.

"This is Gina, our new rousie,,"

"Giddy," said Dick, giving me the familiar but never reassuring once over and returning to the job in hand.

"Morning all," said a voice from the holding pen, and I was introduced to Jack Smythe, the farmer, a slowly spoken man of late middle age.. He jumped lightly out of the pen and proceeded to explain where all the different pieces from a full wool fleece should go as it came off. I was confused immediately but there was no time to worry, the men were into it.

It takes quite a long time to get it right when you've never touched a fleece before, let alone thrown one.

"Grab the back leg as she comes off and then wait for the other one and fold that bit over the rest, keeping hold of the legs pick it all up and flick it out over the table," Zack did his best to explain and then to demonstrate the technique and I struggled along, throwing

some upside down or half off the table or completely twisted. There was hardly time to panic over one sloppy effort before the next fleece was hitting the boards. In between them there were the bellies and second pieces and dags to worry about. I was soon numb with disbelief at the pace I was going to have to maintain for nine hours.

"So this is work," I thought grimly, tossing a heavy fleece too far over the table and then lunging for the broom before it was knocked to the floor by Dick, swinging a fat ewe out of his catching pen.

By now as well as Jack at the wool table and filling the pens, there was an ancient old man with a long face hanging under a felt hat. He gave me a surly nod and retrieved my hectic fleeces with patient contempt. Zack told me later that he was Jack's old uncle, William Smythe, who had never married and always worked on the farm, he remembered and preferred the days when women never appeared in woolsheds, except with scones.

What with the old man's dubious looks, my own ineptitude and Dick's casual glances down my T Shirt when I bent over the fleeces, I was decidedly unnerved. Zack was kind but I could feel that he and the farmer were also watching me to see, as it was later put into words, "Can the hippie sheila work?"

Sentences like that one or when they said "What are ya, a bloody girl or what?" to each other. To me the labels had always been literary jokes or myths, no-one talked like that. But here it was for real and the words were an expression of strongly held views of reality that made me feel utterly alone. And all the time the sun on the roof came pouring through the tin.

It was after lunch and I was getting a few things sorted out. Somehow I could just keep up and throw the fleeces almost adequately. I began to notice the atmosphere on the board. A shearing shed is a place where despite the noise and the constant movement everyone is very aware of each other. There may be a little talk but there are continual exchanges and reactions between the people in the gang and in my opinion, between the sheep as they wait, submit or struggle with their fate. As for Zack and Dick they were engaged in serious competition. The former with a grin of pleasure, the latter with a tight grimace, raced each other sheep for sheep, tally for tally. They watched the clock and they watched each other, keeping neck and neck for the whole day.

"They can't be like this everyday," I thought, pressing myself against the wall between them as they charged simultaneously into the catching pens. At smoko they flopped against the bales of pressed wool. Jack was also doing the pressing, and both appeared perfectly affable, except for one moment's pause when Jack would call out the tallies from the pens underneath. A moment's pause and then, "Put one round you that time Dick," "Look out next run mate". The violence with which they plunged into the very next sheep belied the camaraderie, or maybe I just didn't understand.

For myself at smoko, I sat down with shaking legs, my eyes closing involuntarily. Mary Smythe, who brought the smoko up to the shed, passed me a cup of tea and smiled sympathetically.

"I used to work in my father's woolshed," she said, "It was a six stand shed then. But the first day is always the worst."

I watched her stretching a length of wool between her fingers, running an expert eye over the year's harvest. She was a tall woman, taller than Jack with little flesh over wide hips, thin arms in a faded cream blouse. I felt young and small and chubby but also that she had accepted me instantly, she wasn't running any tests.

"I'd better go and get your dinner on," she said and I followed her with my eyes as she walked past the window and down the paddock towards the house. There passed the wife with her basket and apron but her passage down the slope suggested a freedom in these fields. If the farm spoke she was the voice; land being a tired body too, constantly used, slightly poisoned now and in places stripped to the bone. But land and the woman of it, both in their essentials still rich and capable.

All too soon we were back on the board, battling with the wool and the hot still air pressing down. You couldn't afford to look out the narrow window at the blue flash of sea away across the melting fields and the white sand.

"I could go a nice cold DB and a swim," said Zack shaking sweat out of his eyes.

"So could I," I said.

"Didn't think you hippies went in for that sort of stuff," said Dick "Don't you smoke grass and stare at your navels round your way? "Of course, all the time," I yelled as I hurled another fleece in the vicinity of the wool table.

"I hear you have some pretty good orgies when you're on drugs?" Dick gave me another less than subtle look of challenge and assessment and Zack who was a newly married man, did his best not to look to interested in the conversation.

I was tired and I couldn't be bothered answering and the work went on. Despite the yawning gulfs in communication and the total monotony, the woolshed from the first exercised a certain fascination. It was so absurdly hot and relentless that the adrenalin was somehow available to keep perfectly in rhythm. In a glazed and detached manner I could admire the will of those men to keep up such a pace. I admired the sureness and skill of their hands and the fluid power of their muscles.

The detachment of this reverie was neatly shattered by Dick again, "Live alone in the bush, don't you" he said, "Don't you like men or what?" He was sensual, almost beautiful as a shearer, until he opened his mouth.

"Yes I live alone and sometimes I like men," was all I could think of to say. At that moment I could have wept for Gary and his role as my lover not to mention the breadth and wit of his conversation, but fortunately and unbelievably it was five o'clock and the last two sheep flew down the portholes virtually in unison.

Jack came up the steps with some cold bottles of beer and Zack passed the first to me since although I was a rousie I might, to some degree, count as a lady. It was blissfully quiet save for the chorus of bleating lambs in the yards, we rested and we drank.

"Must be strange living all by yourself," Zack said this after the beer was drunk and the gear was ground and we were walking down to the quarters for a shower. He was wondering aloud without snide implications and we were innocently, irrevocably drunk after a few cold beers, and the hard day's work. I wondered too on the strangeness of living alone, my dreadful attacks of loneliness seemed remote compared to the sublime moments that I couldn't explain to a person locked so tightly into the work ethos.

"There is a reason for living there, a purpose," I thought, stumbling and dancing down the paddock, "It is strange too, I'm nineteen years old but I'm lucky to have it." The words from Thoreau that I had just discovered came into my head,

"I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than the work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life but so much over and above my usual allowance. I realised what the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works,"

It had taken this job, this utter contradiction of stillness and contemplation to give me a sense of good fortune and purpose as an individual who lived alone. Thus on the first day I knew I could survive the season, enjoy it even.

In a daze I sat down at the farmhouse dinner table which faced a shining sheet of glass and revealed the beach, a travel brochure sunset. My plate before me was laden with tender roast mutton and gravy, roast potatoes, pumpkin and fresh peas. This was followed by blackberry pie and cream. I consumed it all with the joy of having it all laid on, it was like a new childhood. I moved towards the dishes but she wouldn't have it, she waved me away to my bed.

The sun had barely set on the quarters, the men in the next room were talking and a glass clinked against a bottle for a moment as I and my aching body, blanked out.

OUT of the deepest sleep (another midnight, another farm), I felt a hand on my leg. I suppose I should have seen it coming. It was only a week since we cut out at Smythe's but we had been working every day since, one day on Wilson's lambs and now two thousand ewes to shear for the Johnson's. Over this time Dick's remarks as to my person and my morals had been getting more explicit. And I, committed to honest answers had confused the issue further.

"Well, you're obviously not a virgin," he would say, "Neither are you obviously," I'd mutter. "But it's different for men," he really did believe it. Was there no middle ground between potential wife and available slut in his experience?

"Who's that," my legs shrank up into my sleeping bag and I pushed myself to wake up, swimming back from some miles down in sleep.

"Thought you might be cold," I hated the way Dick whispered it, his hand still lying so close to my leg. I immediately thought of tomorrow morning, to get rid of him, how to face him, how to get on with my precious sleep.

"No I wasn't cold, I was asleep," even to myself it sounded like a frigid headmistress but Dick persisted.

"Thought you might be lonely?"

"No"

It was so very boring but I was still scared, I'd been through it before but you never know how hard they're going to push, what you do know is they are bigger than you, your anger has to grow to match their bulk. But the windows were flat with darkness and the dark farm stretched away for empty miles. The farm house was out of shouting range and Zack asleep in the next room was an unknown quantity.

"Don't you know it's part of the rousie's job to be nice to the gun shearer?"

"He hates me," I thought, hatred with a blunt sexual reek, although I sensed he was smiling, pretending a joke in the darkness.

"Look Dick, I've got to get some sleep, I'm not as fit as you guys,"

We stared at each other in silence, I prayed he'd believe me, that this just wasn't on, but it seemed he was from the school brought up to believe that "they" mean Yes when they say No. He leaned forward and his hand clamped down on my leg again. So I got really angry,

"Fuck off,"

To my surprise he let go and stood up.

"Alright, alright, no need to swear," and he walked to the door of their room. He stopped at the door as if waiting to see me change my mind. I saw from his silhouette that he was wearing his jeans, therefore this wasn't a totally spontaneous accident of lust. It was bizarre but I felt a prick of conditioned guilt, had some fleeting acknowledgement of his ever-less-appealing good looks been misinterpreted? I turned over to face the wall and held my breath until I heard his bedsprings creak in the next room.

But I didn't go back to sleep, I got depressed instead. Because the sun was going to come up soon and we would all go to work and nothing more would be said. It was nothing anyway. I reminded myself of one trip to the city staying with friends in a big house, and somebody's husband decided to have the perfect close encounter with me. It involved hours and hours of having to talk about it, having to rationalise my disinterest and having to listen to him rationalise it before I could get some sleep. Equally depressing was the thought that if either of these men had appealed to me with the correctly tortured romantic intensity I would have fallen into their arms. "Fallen" is the operative word; like a dead weight, abrogating all control and self respect for the helplessness of "love" as on the popular radio.

This very morning the radio was whining about love forever, stand by your man etc; mostly it was good to have any sort of music to work to but today exhaustion lent a grotesque edge to my perceptions.

At last it was seven am and breakfast in a yellow and lime painted kitchen. I sat beside Zack, hypnotised by a flock of cream china swans struggling to fly towards open country as depicted on a nearby Dalgety's calendar. Meanwhile Fran Johnson was serving up porridge and hot milk and sausages and eggs and toast for the workers, with her three young children milling around her. Her engagement photo was hanging beside a large white clock and the date was printed in tiny letters underneath, 1968. In barely seven years she had aged alarmingly while her husband Brian, although thinning on top and weatherbeaten, looked fresh and boyish by comparison.

The novelty of eating huge meals prepared by already over-worked women, was waning. These men ate in silence or there might be some technical assessments of the weather. They were fuelling themselves up for labour and it seemed to preclude interaction. They usually said "Thank you," as they strode off to the "real" work to be done, but no-one so much as rinsed a tea cup. A woman like Fran was always first out of bed and last in the kitchen at night. Her day began waking up the men and plugging in the jug for the first of many times. When they had gone she fed the ducks and chooks and milked the two cows and did the kids' breakfast. Then housework and cooking for the shearing gang while somehow from one corner of her eye she supervised her oldest child's correspondence school-work, holding the baby against her hip or laying her crying in the pram. But as well there was always her ongoing work on the farm; helping with the muster or grubbing thistles or batoning the odd fence. The awareness of such labour dawned on me slowly as the season advanced. I wondered if these women had more chromosomes than me, something that gave them the strength to do it all without audible complaint, but too often there was a jar of valium next to the Quickeze packet on the kitchen ledge or a woman moving miserably inside a stone or so of extra flesh.

Back in the vital world of government guaranteed wool price, farm subsidies and cheap interest loans from the Rural Bank, they were sneering at dole bludgers and overstayers. It was smoko and Zack and Brian were applauding Mr Gill for instigating the dawn raids on Polynesians. Dick was busy cleaning combs and cutters and not looking at me for a change. Maybe it had been worth it after all.

While listening in I gazed out the open door of the shed and noticed a heavy old ewe, as yet to be shorn, who was staggering down to the drain lying between the paddock and the wool shed. She gave a flop down the bank and then lay in the water.

"I think she's stuck," I said to Brian, pointing out the door.

"Bloody old bag," he said and swung down the bank into the drain. He heaved her out onto the bank where she lay, obviously dying. I watched his boot swing back and into her side to get her on her feet but to no avail. Then he came back to the shed where he was preparing to drench lambs. "It gets on my wick," Zack was saying to him, "They come over here and they don't know how to behave and then they take all the bloody jobs too," "What you mean is they were brought in as a cheap source of labour and now at the start of a recession it's time to get rid of them," I should have saved my breath but I never could, all the time my eyes following the old ewe, rising painfully to her feet and then staggering back to the drain.

"There's still plenty of work around," said Brian, "But the only people who want Islanders are those who are too lazy to go out and get a job anyway."

He looked out of the door and saw the old ewe down in the drain again. "Bloody hell," he said without expression and clambered back down to her, dragging her sodden lifelessness back onto the bank.

"It's not right that jokers like me and Dick have to break our backs and then half of it goes in tax to support layabouts on the dole," Zack was talking to me now.

"Wait a minute," I said, "I pay tax too and I'd much rather it was spent on people than on bloody warships and bombs to kill them with,"

"Yeah, but, if we didn't have defence then the bloody Chinese would be here in a flash, or the place would be crawling with Islanders,"

"For God's sake we are Islanders," I was losing my temper as usual.

"Oh no we're not," said Brian, looking offended, "We're civilised." The bad night had caught up with me, the old ewe lay dead in the field, I could feel strings of abuse rising in my throat.

"What is so civilised? Our race, we go around the world like a disease taking what we want from others, poisoning what we touch and then we call them a bunch of animals,"

"Well they are more like animals than us," said Zack.

"She knows it really but she's just not going to admit. Anyone can see the way they live isn't so developed and they're closer to apes than Europeans," Brian was getting cross now but I wanted the last word,

"So you think they're animals, well what does that make you?"

It was not a question anyone bothered to address. After all, this conversation, despite the bad feeling it had generated, was merely theoretical for us all and the clock had moved around to one o'clock. We went back to work in silence. Dick was looking more cheerful in view of my general disgrace and also he had shorn more sheep than Zack two days in a row.

"What I want to know," he said to me as I knelt at his feet scraping up dags, "Is what made you come and live up here in the first place if you weren't looking for a boyfriend and you don't agree with the way we think around here?"

I certainly wasn't going to talk about Gary with him, my initial reason for coming here, but there were other reasons, other truths.

"I wanted to live in the country and this place is beautiful, I love it,"

I gathered up another heavy greasy fleece and threw it, I ran back to sweep the crutchings and pick up the next belly. Bending, reaching, running it was now automatic and my mind was free. It returned to me then as in many a private moment, a private leap to my beach and the rock to sail away upon. The beloved mountain, all the landscape drawing towards then falling away from her. All the water beating against her and flowing between us, the conductor of her presence, the continuous nature of the daily mountain, infinite possibilities, infinite colour. A small cloud accompanying the several peaks, almost transparent. No snow, but fields of cloud would lie across the ridges and the blue outline rising out of them. Green flanks and dark scars on the skirt of the mountain, another angle, another resonance of strength.

"Yeah it's not a bad place to live," Dick sounded startled to be agreeing with me, but after all he had been born here in the cottage hospital down the road. He had grown up here on a farm, grown up hunting and diving and riding. He knew all the bush for miles around and all the natural riches pertaining to each season. Within him lived the unconscious knowledge that here was his centre. There was no need for more than a brush with bright lights or foreign countries. He had actually been to the South Island and Western Australia, but from a woolshed window you don't have to see a great deal to challenge your version of reality, wherever that woolshed maybe.

But his question had started me thinking about how it came to pass that I had left my home and my good friends and my urban life. How I had abandoned a variety of plans and chances to end up here. The radio too gave me a synchronistic nudge in the form of a song that had been Gary's and mine, Janis Joplin singing *Summertime* when the living was going to be easy for us, all our fantasies realised. "One of these mornings you're going to rise up singing." The newly buried fallen angel voice filled the woolshed with pain and light.



Lora

JOANNA TOLD ME ABOUT IT WELL IN ADVANCE. "WE'RE HAVING A WOMEN'S WEEKEND, FOR LOCAL WOMEN MAINLY. WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO A WRITING WORKSHOP?"

It sounded great. Other women in the community had shown an interest in the Writing co-op and this was the chance to share with them the experience of writing with women. At our next meeting we talked about it. Julie would be away, Catherine had to work that weekend, so Chrise and I were "elected".

The time flew and inevitably it was in the few days before the Hui, as it was now called, that Chrise came to see me and we sorted out what we would do. I remember the day well, my washing machine was broken and we talked in the wash-house as I scrubbed the laundry and pushed it through the hand wringer.

The women organising the Hui had decided to keep the structure open, to see what everyone wanted to do before finalising workshops, so we had no idea what numbers, or what space, we should plan for. We decided that for a comfortable writing group ten was probably the upper limit, and we prepared three exercises.

Chrise had an idea which we agreed should get the words flowing. We would give a story line, with a few key points to be included. The elements were carefully chosen ones which had symbolic value, and we both knew from experience that they seemed to conjure images in the mind.

Though we had only tried writing poetry once in the Co-op, I had heard from Marion Evans of Spiral that a Wellington group had done so with great success. I felt that if we "primed" the group first by reading some poetry, we might find it easier to start writing verse. In addition there was the exercise which stayed in my mind from a workshop I had been to with Renée, writing about an early experience with one's mother I wanted to try this again.



We arrived on Friday night, most of us tired. We know each other, see each other often, but in busy lives find little time to relax together. Now there was hot soup and bread, some talk, some music, chanting, tears of release and laughter. Because it seemed just right for the moment I offered a small poem of mine and it was taken up as a chant which wove in and out of the fabric of the weekend...

"Sweet mother of treachery
Sea of my fears
Lay still your waters
Let loose my tears"

We went to bed early, already wrapped in the magic of women's space.

Next morning was fine, a bonus in mid-winter so we made the most of it, with

exercising then a big walk to the beach. Braver ones swam in surprisingly warm surf, there were games in the sand, laughter again and the delight of doing totally, selfishly what WE pleased.

It was late afternoon before we all gathered again inside. What would we do? How about writing? What, everybody?

Well, why not, so we handed out paper and pens to the 25 or so women and Chrise explained:

"You are to write about a walk. Start in a house, then go through a forest. You find a container, then come to water, a town and finally a wall. Don't think about it too much, just write what comes into your head."

For us it was strange and rather forced, having done it before, but we were pleased to see other women engrossed, concentrating. One of the reasons that we had thought to limit the size of the group was that we like each person to read her work aloud. With this number it looked like a marathon task. In fact, it was a joy and a revelation. Each story was different, each imbued with that particular woman's

magic. By the time the last story had been read, long after nightfall, the air was charged with excitement. Many women were amazed at what they themselves had written.

Next day we held another workshop, this time our planned small group, meeting in a nearby house. We wrote a short prose piece about our mothers, discussing each person's writing and inevitably comparing and sharing further thoughts on this endless topic.

Then came the poetry, some of our own, some by other women, like Heather McPherson....

"Simply let go a while a while

Let words flow though they don't though they cross

cut and scatter and skirt into underneath hide...."

We set a topic, "How you feel, right now." The fire burned. We were held in the glowing room, in stillness, concentration. When we came to look at what we had made, only Carmen had balked at the idea, though she clothed her resistance in words:

I won't write one

one?

another one of those poems.

They live

but live

in a world of their own.

Sometimes: crowding in narrow spaces
ready to burst out

Sometimes: drifting elegantly
at a slow pace
through wide and cool halls.

Now and then
the door is opened

for me to join with them
be with them
know them

Occasionally
one of them

(or two if I'm lucky)

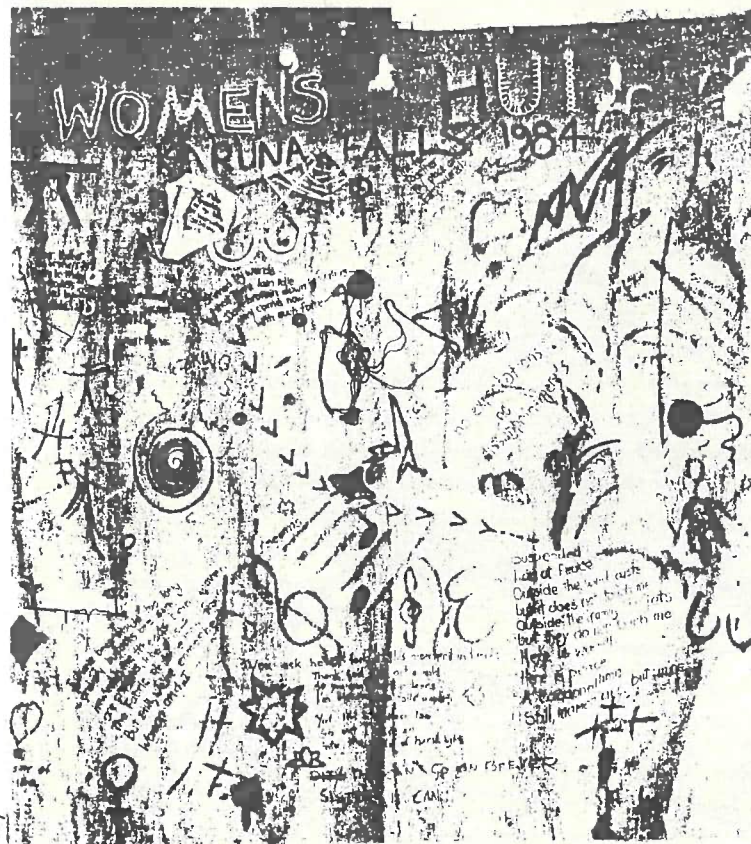
will come with me, as I leave again.

They are not
to be dragged out
on to a white walled sheet of paper

because I want

They live in perfect resistance.

Some of the verses are scattered now, but those that remain bring me back to that time with each re-reading.



Kay

THOUGHT FLOWS
Stirred by words
that have lain idle
dam broken down by waters -
they come now
with such force.

Chrise

PRESSURE POINT
So much red in this room
women in red,
our rages
locked in the hinge of our jaws.
Stay no more our feelings
let our power
pour from our hearts, our wombs
till the shamefree stains of women
colour the world.

Lora.

THE HUI
Suspended,
I am at peace.
Outside the wind gusts,
but it does not touch me.
Outside the family buffets
but they do not touch me.
Here is warmth
Here is peace
A cocooned time
Still, momentary, but mine.

Jocelyn.

YOU ASK HOW I FEEL AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME...
Thank God I've got a cold
so you can't see the tears
I'm blowing into toilet paper.
Yet I'm a mother too
so out I must go
into the world of harsh lights...
Pity this can't go on forever.

Joan.

This isn't the end. Some women wanted more. Things happen slowly here in the country, but the seed has been sown for an open writing workshop sometime in the future.



KUIA

She took us once
down roads of powdered dust
towards a town forgotten
to where the outskirts of her
youth called back her mind,
we stopped beside the hitchrail there —

The Outing

Catherine Delahunty

I SAW THE CREAM YACHT coming up the coast on the morning breeze. She was leaning over with her sail reefed down as she came around the arm of our bay. I thought nothing, you know how you notice without really noticing. There was the cream yacht tacking towards our jetty, as it did every three days. And there was the bread rising under the damp towel. I'd just washed the churn and put the new butter away in the safe.

It was quiet. Matt and Ronnie had gone off at dawn up to the bush camp where they were cutting scrub. I could see Jay ploughing down in the sea paddock, he always loaded the cream cans himself. He'd had words with Jamie last night and Jamie had taken off this morning, riding out to check some cattle, or so he said to me out of the corner of his mouth. It was better that he went off for today, better to keep out of his father's sight for a while. Serena was away too, staying over to help Mrs French our nearest neighbour with her new baby. I missed Serena, especially in the mornings with the dairy work and the washing, but it was good for her to be amongst other people, she was growing up.

So there I was as the clock struck nine, leaning the sore place in my back against the hot stove, looking but not seeing the fresh flowering clumps of jonquils amongst the fields below, looking but not realising the wind making white tops on the water so blue. Spring was really here but I didn't feel it as I once had, how the sap used to kick then in my blood. I used to feel it in the greening of the hills and see it too, lifting the clouds off the sea. It was always a busy time, yes, but not much more than any other. I had been married to Jay for thirty-one years now and the spring had dissolved into a single memory.

I wasn't the same girl who stumbled along the jetty and followed the young man up the steep track to the house. I marvelled then at the house perching above the bay, a strongly built if rough, nest. I entered the kitchen half daunted, half captured, I caught the apron that Jay tossed me and tied it over my black satin travelling dress and I made supper on the coal range, real life had begun. Then spring became a hard time, many years that merge into a single spring, heavy with child. The wind was so cold from the sea as I huddled against the cow, she kicking at the cold bucket. Even my vomit tasted of salt as I clutched at the door of the cow shed, my waters breaking. That was the lonely morning when I had Jamie or was it Matt, and Jay was ploughing. He was ploughing the same sea paddock. I could see him walking behind the brown horse's back, I called out for him to come but he didn't look up until he'd finished the row. I prayed for a daughter then, I prayed for a woman's face, even if it was just a little baby. Because we had no neighbours, not for miles, it was just us out here at the bay.

When Mary French was in labour this last time, George came over on the horse and asked me to come and help. Jay wasn't pleased to see me go but I went anyway. I left Serena to take care of the house and I spent the whole night kneeling beside Mary. There wasn't much I could do, I had no special skill, but she said she was glad to have me there. Mostly she hardly seemed to notice where she was, hours and hours she pressed her back on the wall behind the bed. I knew then how lucky I really was, how little trouble I'd had bearing my children. They had all thrived too, except the last one, Sophia, she was stillborn.

I started the ride home when Mary was finally delivered of a daughter, I was dead tired but the morning was so beautiful. The horse knew the track through the thin bush and then out onto the tops. The kowhai was in flower in a green valley on the French's side of the ridge. Not much of that left on our side now, Jay and his father had seen to that; years they had worked in all weathers to clear this land, right to the top of the ridge. There was no fence yet but I could see the start of it, way down the hill, toy sticks marching up the slope. I rode slowly down the steep track, my head light with weariness and gratitude for the sun shining on the silver ocean, and for the survival of us all through an arduous night. I felt as if I could see right round the world that morning, although it was but a small journey of seven miles, the first one for too many years to count.

When I got home Jay was in the kitchen, cold and silent. He ate his bread that Serena had carefully baked as if it might be poisoned, his own daughter. But I didn't mind about anything that day. As I boiled up the copper, as I scrubbed the mud caked hems of the mens trousers, I kept seeing Mary's face, when finally the pain was over. I washed and wrapped the baby, who squalled in her flannel world till Mary put her to the breast. I promised her then that I would send Serena over to help her out with the other children. Her face in the dim room had changed from older than old to a young woman again. Then George came in with a glass of fresh warm milk, he thanked me for coming, he was a good man.

I stood there remembering that morning, as the irons were heating on the fire and the cream yacht was now dropping her sails altogether and making fast to the jetty. She went up and down on the tide, a grey and white splash. Something made me go out onto the porch where I could see Jay leading the horse and dray with the cream cans along the jetty to the yacht. I should have been ironing, there was a heap of clothes and then the garden to plant this morning. I felt none of the customary pleasure looking over at the waiting patch of earth. Usually, planting the garden out was one of my private joys. Jamie always dug it over for me, my back was just about had it. All that I had to do was take the trays of peas and lettuce off the window sill and put the little plants into their places in the warm sweet earth. Mary French had given me some seeds from home, some of the old flowers, a precious twist of tissue paper in my apron pocket. But I felt no interest in this task. I could see the seeds germinate, the plants grow. I could see me picking and cooking and bottling and the plants dying off. I knew the end to be as the beginning and the ground seemed sour even in its richness. A flock of gannets were flying past the mast of the cream yacht. How my heart and my heavy body leaned towards those singing easy wings.

Then I looked down again, there was someone else getting off the boat. It wasn't Clarrie or Bradley, I knew their coats, their walks and besides I could see Clarrie on the deck in his sou'wester. Bradley was leaning up to take a can from Jay, the boat was rocking. Who was it? I took a step off the porch into the garden and I could still see him on the jetty and then I knew him.

"It's Royce, my brother, it's Royce come up from town to see me," I started running down the hill, holding up my stupid skirts, thinking Royce my brother and Emily and the children, I hope all is well. It was twenty years since I'd seen the red hair of my brother. It was a while since I'd done any running too. The cows stared at me as I ran past them and down the field. The wind was really blowing now. I had to slow down to a walk as I went through the hay paddock corner to catch my breath and then I came around the cabbage trees by the sheep yards. Royce and Jay were shouting at each other, the wind carried their words to me.

"She's not going," Jay yelled, "I can't spare her," Royce answered but I couldn't hear it. He was a very big man now, still with a head of bright red hair. I looked at the grey bearded weather beaten man my husband, they were both strangers to me. Jay was turned towards the sea and shouting again.

"I tell you I can't spare her, not for three whole days," Jay spared no-one and nothing. He was nailed to his endeavour, he was as spare and steep as his inheritance. I had married him for the honesty of his proposal, "I need a wife," his hungry innocence that matched my own. I had sought to soften his iron in vain, he mocked infirmity, especially his own.

"It's springtime man and I can't spare her," he was bellowing. Then it was like the music hall I once saw when I was a girl, Royce picked Jay up by the shirt, "You will spare her by God or I'll break your neck," I saw him drop Jay again so I turned then and I walked back up the hill. My heart beat slowly now, all was calm inside me. I walked past the cows, Millie with her golden incurious eyes and her heavy white udder nearly touching the ground, and thin wicked Fanny, her daughter. I saw the new jonquils with their orange skirts as I walked up to the wide porch. How often had I swept those smooth boards? To look at them was to feel the beat beat of the old broom in my hands. I walked into the cool dark of my house and I hung my apron up by the stove.

It took not time to take the black satin travelling dress out of the camphor wood chest. I shook it out but it had been folded for thirty years. The black was faded, the skirt was crushed. I pulled it on, like entering a musty dark cloud, down over my petticoats. My blue cotton work dress fell on the floor and I walked over it to the mirror. It took a while to do up the tiny satin buttons on the bodice and then I looked into the yellow mirror. There was no denying the woman that I was, the dress was loose across my bosom where once it had fitted closely. It was tight over my hips where once it had fallen gently. Once my body had been softly upright, too full I'd thought until that satin dress had moulded me. Where had she gone? Five pregnancies, four children pulling at the breast. The thirty years of milking and kneading dough, of scrubbing wood white and work clothes clean. The thirty years of breath, lying in the darkness beneath the muscles, the inexhaustible bones of my husband.

I smoothed out the satin as best I could, the black had faded in rusty streaks. I put on my gloves out of the top drawer. I couldn't think what I should take, what I would need in a town. Oh Emily, of Royce, I was afraid now, what was a town? Buildings, people, the world. Really it should be Jamie or Serena going, not my yellowish reflection. Where was my little basket with the silk lining? I put in my best underwear and the brush and comb set that Emily had sent one Christmas. It was her doing I knew, not even blood but she had made me her sister. I covered my things with my best handkerchief.

Then I closed the damper on the stove and covered the milk jug with its cloth. It couldn't be but was the same cloth that I'd sewed those beads onto, the first day in this kitchen. Then away down the hill in my best dress with my old and only shoes still on my feet. The cream yacht was big and stood out sharp as never before against the wet dark wood of our old jetty.

"My father started here," Jay was wont to say when he stood on the jetty and looked up at the acres of cleared land. The jetty defied the rip of the tide and the fierce storms. Even on calm days the water seemed to drag and suck at the timbers, but nothing moved.

I came past the cabbage trees again and down towards the sea. Royce was walking up to meet me, Jay was holding onto the horse and dray. The cream must be loaded on because Clarrie and Bradley were both standing on the jetty watching us. Royce was smiling and smiling. I didn't cry when he embraced me. I just held tight to my basket and listened to the warm words, "Em is longing to see you. She told me she was tired of waiting. Jay promised to bring you ten years ago. Now we have our new place and she said it's time you came for a visit."

Jay stared at us. He stared at me in my satin travelling dress. It must have looked odd to him too, the woman I had become. His wife, but also this other standing there in the only clothes left to travel in. He stared at my gloves too. Then he turned his back and went stamping back to the half ploughed field. I felt some words trying to come out about the meat in the safe and the ointment for Fanny's udder but I let them go. I let him go stamping back.

Then Royce and I were walking out along the jetty with the water slapping on the posts underneath us. His blue eyes had many lines like mine, a grown man but still clear as a bell, broad as an ox. Clarrie came forward to help me down but I shook my head. I gave the basket to Royce and I sprang down on to that moving deck. The sails went up with a rush and a shiver, the rudder gave a creak, air filled my chest and my skirts, the outing had begun.

IN AOTEAROA

The land being too large
for the people
and flung too wildly
at the water
and the trees so old
with roots flowing out
The farm too full of echoes
for the narrow blinkered heart

The season of suicide and betrayal
brings pohutukawa stains
to such violent flowering
on the road to the sea
as shorn lambs scatter
from the boot of an angry boy

There is a dull fire,
a visible rage
smoking from this hearth
the wind sobs like a struck child
around the trig station.
A cool moon and stars
serve to underline
the family lacerations

Unequal to these stones
indifferent to such powers
he counts his sheep
but labour as he might
(the hills surround, the hills observe)
an alien magic mocks
one man's failure, to love his own.

Catherine



Barbara Wilkie

The Island : A Journal

by Julie Sargisson

JANUARY 21, 1982
THURSDAY 21

This urgency to write before it is lost, yet I know if I never wrote a word or took a photograph it would not be lost, ever. Experience goes deep in the heart and remoulds. This island of white sand is so bright that you could become snowblind — white white white coral sand all around the island and all over the island. The wide road, (it's not really a road), between these houses where we stay is all white sand too. And the forests of coconut palms shimmering green in the sun and shshsh, sound like a river. You walk through forests of them, and you move in a green light and you hear them and feel them, and you look up and they divide the sky with their waving fronds. Grass grows in the sand underneath them.

It was about 5 p.m. on Tuesday that we sighted the islands. Since Sunday at 2 o'clock we'd been on that stinking rolling ship but then there was the day on Aitutaki, the whole day on Monday that they took to load up the ship and unload. The ship, the Mateora, anchored outside the reef and the tug and the deep barge that it pulled going back and forth all day in the burning blinding heat. We all went and Grand stayed and was sick all day and Auntie Grand and Uncle Danny's friends took us to their house and laid out a meal of bananas and fish and bread and banana puke and arrowroot puke and we slept under the coconut palms on the pandanus mats and Ben went to the plantation with the men to get the bananas. So many bananas, they have there, and if the ship doesn't come and take them away they go rotten. So the wharf, when we leave is covered; hundreds of bunches of green bananas. The house we went to there was Tere Kahi's house and she knows Amy and Jimmy (Ben's mother and uncle who he has never met) and she is huge with a smooth beautiful face and a powerful rich voice. A forthright woman, she says *never again will I ask my relatives in New Zealand for money after I go there and see how they sacrifice themselves to make it, here you have no money and you eat — plenty bananas plenty coconuts*. She has a daughter who has had meningitis who wanders around the garden with a bottle she sniffs and rubbish in her other arm and who says nothing ever — just wanders. Strange, but not strange among these strong caring people. Flora and Mariana go off with her two beautiful granddaughters but they are shy. We go down and lie in the lagoon that is almost unbearably warm. A young girl, Terakahi also, I think, talks to me and is nice. She asks me what I do, it's nice, nobody asks me — they be lovely to me and polite to me but they don't ask.

Then all of us, the old ladies from the boat, Bob Mason, the children, the huge bunches of bananas are loaded on the back of the truck and taken back down to the burning wharf to wait in the unbearable heat for the last trip out to the Mateora. The children in the loading pit and us around the sides, we move through the turquoise water refreshed and rejuvenated back to the ship.

*There is so much to tell, I am afraid I am skipping over everything. I can only write impressions as they come and maybe it's later that I have to describe the pictures in my head or even how I felt, how we all felt — a bit sick and rocking and hot and very shy and nervous and wondering at these places, these people who extend themselves so openly, so generously. At Aitutaki, they say if someone is passing, anyone, and you are having kaikai you call them in, always. Aitutaki: the dirt roads, the coconut palms, the heat, the large brown eyes of the children gathered around me whispering *papa'a, papa'a*, the concrete houses and the old empty wooden houses — they've gone to New Zealand, they said. Down by the sea, the small painted outriggers — Piri and Jimi sailing around the lagoon in a blue outrigger. Calling them, we have to go back to the boat.*

Before, on the boat leaving Rarotonga, Flora and Mariana are sick, very sick and then Ben is sick. The long rectangular hold is covered with boards and then canvas and we pile our luggage, more than twenty of us, down the centre, and on each side everyone spreads the mats to sleep on. They put up a heavy plastic tent — shaped cover over the top and that's where we sleep at night. And Flora and Mariana, Ben

and Grand lying sleeping, sick. Flora and Mariana vomiting saying I wish we didn't come. The old ladies lying dignified, covered in pareus. I sit out on the petrol drums and look at the sea. For hours and hours, watching the water explode and fizz, the steel blue water from under the hull of the ship. The engine raps out the drum tattoo and the stink of the diesel is everywhere. I look and look into the vast expanse of ocean but no birds, no fish — a desert rising and falling, I like the rhythm of it and don't feel sick. Later some flying fish, small ones that fly a foot or so above the surface of the water and then dive. I spend many hours watching the sea and making movies in my mind of anything, everything, people, events, past, future possibilities, fantasies. It's wonderful and peaceful, I am glad to be alone.

But after Aitutaki everyone feels better. Flora and Mariana decide they love the boat and sit up on the top deck with the other kids — Jimi and Eileen, an older girl from Otara. We sleep at night, comfortable on the mats, like refugees but with the dignity of the Mamas, who have done this many times and constantly laugh and make jokes and cheek the seamen who are Raro boys they know anyway. And in the evening, sitting outside the tent on the hold, low to the level of the sea and looking at the dark sea, and the stars, the children lying against us, Bob Mason says a prayer and a sermon and then that strange singing — the women in their high whine, the old women and the men answering. Just sitting there listening, all so foreign but yet what else?... simple and beautiful, close to the essence of things. People who work with a reality, go with it, a reality I think I had glimpsed before I came here. And that's where we all sat, waiting to sight the tiny island, outside the tent on the hold, looking looking at the horizon all excited, happy, making jokes, eating and sharing tea and coffee. And then Bird Island, one of the motus and everyone rushes up to the top deck, and there it is, shadows of palm trees, tiny in the distance and everyone is happy and all the children wild and wicked and the Mamas, their grandmothers, issuing threats, that make the dancing eyed children wickeder. It's 5 o'clock, late, it has been three days, a long time and now everyone is glad. Sometimes the boat goes off course and takes many more days or still perhaps has to wait outside the reef all night.

On the boat we sleep next to Grand and Danny — all just stretched out every way on the mats with pareus over us because it's hot. When it rains, the water comes under the mats and we're all wet and we perch on cushions on a wet oily canvas. But it's alright and good to be with people who have always made these journeys one way and another for centuries. It's good to be with the old ones who are strong in body and spirit and are alarmed by nothing and arrange themselves with great pride and dignity in these conditions.

Then we sight the first kaikawa — the white bird — and lots of flying fish and we know the islands are ahead. They talk of the old schooners that sailed around the islands and I am constantly haunted by the times before, the generations, these people, this Pacific ocean, these people of the sea who know it... and the Rarotongan seaman working, loading unloading... \$10 a day.

We cruise slowly approaching Bird Island, Rose Island, more, whose names I forget — unreal islands in turquoise sea covered with palm trees and white white sand. It's hot, shimmering, splendid, a strange movie, quietly now slowly, motoring in. Women singing, flying fish. The Island... and we see the tiny motor boats coming out to meet us. We anchor outside the reef. It is low tide, a treacherous reef.

That was yesterday, and we were woken in the morning from our bed of a pandanus mat on the concrete floor with pillows where we all sleep, and you just sleep, you are tired and it's comfortable... we were woken by a bell clanging to be heard throughout the island and then singing in the church, the strange chanting singing we heard on the boat. Taken from the Bible, Aunty Grand said, the men sing a bit and the women answer in a high chanting whine — it could be Chinese singing. They make it up, the song, and take the story or teaching from the Bible. And then in the morning, Wednesday morning, there's singing from the church; and the church across the wide white sand road from where we stay is old, old, looks almost derelict, it could be of railway sleepers, old heavy boards of unpainted wood bleached an iron grey from the sun and a rusty corrugated iron roof, fine arched windows — shutters also made of wood with fine patterns cut out and around the other side long poles leaned against the side holding the whole building from falling.

There's singing after the bell and lying there on the pandanus mat I wonder — what then, what then? Like the fat brown toddler in Raro, Michelle says — and Ben goes out and says he'll wait for me down the beach, I go out to the veranda of concrete where all the boxes that Grand and David have brought with them from Raro are and sit as it all sways still from the boat. I'm dazed with looking out on the white sand road and coconut palms and the many kiko huts under the palms down to the sea. The kiko huts are the sheds with the racks of copra drying and for storing the small boats that they came and unloaded us from the Mateora in. In one, there are huge old wonderful tragic turtles that they have caught on the motus as they lumbered up to lay their eggs. There they lie on their backs tied to a board by their flippers alive and if you push them they raise their ancient heads. They can lie there alive for months they say. I cannot bear it and avoid walking past that hut.

But then there I'm sitting on the veranda and Aunty Grand comes out and says *come, come* like they all say, a command, and I go into the living room where they sit up from the mats where they have slept — John, the old man and his wife who is old too and might be a Mexican woman and Grand and Sari, and others. I can't remember. John reads from the Bible and we pray, I cannot remember what, everything is rocking from the boat and strange and hot. Flora is with me, and Mariana has gone down the beach with Ben.

A small boy sits on a rock out in the lagoon while I write, and he is singing a wild Maori song at the top of his voice while picking the clams 'paua' they call them. When Ben went fishing with the men this morning, Grand and me and Flora and Mariana and Jimi went to pick the clams down in from of the houses where we stay, down where the kiko sheds are and what they call the park; the wooden seats under the

ironwood trees and where the passage for the boats is — through the reef, and the wide expanse, the white sand. And Grand and me and Jimi sat on the coral out in the deep lagoon where the coral is beautiful sea-flowers like heather, pink and purple, and she picked them with mask and snorkel and her skirt and T-shirt, telling me how to cut them. I sat in the water and cut them, cutting out the black bit that you don't eat with all the fish around me in the water; the flat fish that swim upright, not like a flounder, that have brilliant yellow heads and black stripes. And I sat on the coral up to my waist in crystal water with these yellow fish, ten, perhaps twenty swimming around my legs for the bits of paua. Like losing your breath for a moment — a flash of perfection, a wonder. And then too yesterday, Mariana and me here where I am now, lying in the lagoon and the old ladies picking paua off the rocks and Matavea and the boys came with the baby turtles to put them in a new box. They let them go, and there we are, Mariana and me with all the baby turtles swimming around us and catching them before they swim too far. There are many boxes floating in the sea tied by a rope to a tree on the beach, they are half-filled with sea water and they keep the baby turtles there while they grow. When they're big enough they let them go in the sea. The children catch them, when they come out of their eggs here on the island and on the motus. The first night I ate the turtle meat — here try it... and you can't refuse, and I ate it and it was strong and delicious but no more... There are two huge turtles tied by their flippers on a rope into the sea, sort of tethered like a goat or a lamb. They just lie and swim a bit and surface and raise their strange old lizard heads with their ancient cow eyes for a breath and sink again. The boys pull them back to the edge and climb on their backs and ride them the length of the rope.

And from here I look out beyond the reef to a motu covered in palm trees and the turquoise deep and brilliant lagoon and the huge bits of red iron on the reef from a wrecked ship. Coming in on the motor boats, small wooden boats with outboard motors, going through the reef at low tide was dicy. In the water you look and see the reef and they wait for a wave to come to carry the boat in deep enough water over it.



Barbara

FRIDAY 22

I am not keeping up with all the things I want to write down. It's such a solo affair, writing, and I feel too self-conscious to write among them as they are not readers and writers and I already represent many things they understand of Europeans even if I am not remotely those things.

But last night Ake gave us a small room of our own. We had been sleeping in a big room next to the lounge and a thoroughfare to the kitchen and we'd roll up our bed in the morning and everyone would start wandering through at about 5 a.m. It didn't matter, it was quite funny, everyone shouting and laughing on the veranda at 5 o'clock, especially the old ones. John, Ake, David and Grand all get up at dawn. Here there is a double bed, and enough room for Flora and Mariana to sleep on the floor on the mat. The slat window on one side looks out to the wide road, the road like a boulevard of sand that crosses from one side of the island to the other, so to stand in the middle you look one way and there's the sea, and you look the other way and there's the sea. But not only the sea; these houses, some wooden, some concrete, a few shrubs around them but just sitting in the sand, no fences. And here, this slatted window, looks out on the old church I described and the huge concrete water tank beside it. Everywhere these water tanks as the island has no streams — the drill for the washing water and the tank for drinking. The little blue painted shed is the weather office where Earnest works, Ben's cousin.

The fishermen have come home from the reef with six big salmon. Jimi and Flora caught many small fish from fishing off the beach yesterday — exotic brilliant fish and we ate them for tea and then this morning for breakfast. The lie on the plate cooked whole with their eyes and their goldfish lips and little sharp buck teeth. Sara cooks all the food for everyone — always she is in the kitchen, or with her baby, Tali, a little sal-low girl with strangely unseeing eyes and black curls close to her head. She is silent. I want to help Sari and she indulges me and it is good when we talk but I know she has always worked this way and doesn't think of it or question it. She has always lived on the Island, always with her parents, and the kitchen and the white sand under the coconut palms to the cookhouse is well trodden by her. Yesterday she baked eight loaves of bread and we carried them to the cookhouse, a rusty corrugated iron open shed, but laid with clean white coral stones. The oven was a drum set in the earth where the coconut husks and the shells burned and a big black iron chain. She put the small cans of water in first and set the loaf tins on top and put on the lid. There were two of these and a bin full of coconut husks for burning and an open fire on the other side — all neat and clean among the white coral stones.

The coconut palms sound like a river — *shshshshsh* — they impose gently and exquisitely upon your consciousness everywhere on the island — they are the island — the baskets, the oil, the copra, the nu for drinking, the coconut sauce you eat with everything, the puke, husks for burning and growing things in, medicine and their wonderful green shade. I see the breadfruit trees from here too. It could be Mexico, or how I imagine it to be, Jamaica.

Still, I have not finished writing about first arriving here, at this picture post card island. This island where the people have little money, where they eat fish and coconuts and kumera and become tired of it like anyone anywhere. Where a ton of

copra brings \$300. In their boats the men sail or motor to the motus, climb the trees, husk the nuts, dig out the copra, dry it on these racks, sack it, send it away... a whole ton. Where David worked in New Zealand for nine months to buy a generator for the whole island. This picture post card island.

Once the Mateora anchored — the men opened up the hold and baggage was thrown from the ship to small boats, all rocking, with the men and the boys on the boats hanging on to the sides of the ship, catching bags, catching children, helping the big fat Mamas climb over the sides of the ship and lower into the boats below. Boat after boat came out to get load after load of all their supplies, wildly excited children, all of us happy to be here and off the ship at last. We watched the island, this unreal painted island and the motus — gleaming white sand, green coconut palms, the reef with the waves breaking over. We passed out our luggage, we waited till last, till old John came back out after taking Grand in. Aunty Grand had changed in the cabin for the occasion into a big red shirt and lime green loose matadors with an ei on her head of purple orchids and tiger orchids. They had returned after six months in Rarotonga and she was so happy, a big grin as she sat in the motor boat with her Island relations and her baggage around her like some wonderful island queen. We waited in the late afternoon sun and watched the men unload the hold of bananas and endless boxes, everyone yelling in Maori wanting to get it all in before dark.

Finally we climb into John's motor boat, Flora, Mariana, me and these three men from the island. We cross the reef — wait wait now... the wave carries us across the jagged coral which is just beneath the boat and in through the turquoise waters closer and closer to the sand, the white sand, the groups of dark people, the palms and kiko huts among them, the mounds of luggage on the white sand. It was warm warm and evening dusk and the sea to step into warm and crystal clear and Jimi already swimming like a big black seal and Grand saying come come meet my relatives and all coming and kissing me first one cheek then the other and the children staring with wide dark eyes — a papa'a woman... this is my daughter-in-law says Grand and I feel rocky and breathless and filled with deep wonder and a sense of it's not real it's not real... time slows, we stand and stare... Matavea comes, a skinny black girl with black eyes and puts her arms around Flora and Mariana who also stand breathless in a small capsule of wondering wonderful time stopped... to stand there and stare forever.

Then the wheelbarrows — *here come the taxis*, they all laugh and the men carry the luggage on their shoulders and the women carrying, pushing wheelbarrows, talking, kissing laughing... For me it is all a blur — dark faces, very dark people, big women with sweet faces and the strange lilting English, white sand, the dry brown kiko huts everywhere that make you feel the foreignness, a stranger, and slowly walking up to this house with Flora and Mariana and Matavea. And then I can't remember... everything rocking we walked in a daze with Grand around the houses being introduced, eating...

SATURDAY 23

I feel washed through, inside and out, by the sea — an exquisite physical weariness, my skin tingling... It must be five in the afternoon. After breakfast this morning three boatloads of us went to lay the rau. Earnest and Thomas, Ari, Ben and me and the old one, one of John's brothers, in a wooden boat built on the island. We motored to North Island, a motu like The Island; coconut palms and pandanus and white sand. We collected poreo for Flora and Mariana and walked along the beach with Ari who made us climb a coconut palm grown sideways and took our photo. I wanted most of all to take his but I was too shy. There were kiko huts there, the ones used by those who come for the copra. The sea was clear and that brilliant turquoise colour of all the lagoons here and the clouds were banking up — dark rain clouds. The other boats had come, wooden sailing boats but with the outboard motors on as the wind wasn't right. Boats piled high with the rau, a twisted mass of palm leaves. I couldn't imagine how it worked. All of us — the girls, the old lady, the fishermen, motored to the other end of the lagoon, anchored the boat, threw over the end of the rau and we all began to wade, pulling one end of the rau as we went with the small boat feeding it out in a huge circle. Thomas, the young girls, twelve or so years old but women already, me, Ari, Ben and the others, all spaced apart pulling the net in a huge circle. Often it would break and have to be tied and we waded and pulled and waded and pulled in the warm waist-deep lagoon. The rain came, poured across the sea blown by the wind and we ducked under the sea — rain cold. It might have been a scene from the Old Testament — pulling the rau, shouting on instructions to each other, in the wide semi-circle, the rain turning the sea into a mass of dark waves and it was cold. I don't know for how long we waded up to our waists and then gradually into shallower water through the lagoon towards the reef. It could have been for hours. The rau formed a huge circle of spiky green leaves and brown leaves and now it was all fed out and we all just pulled, you couldn't see any fish. Then the circle was becoming smaller and smaller and the rau was being pulled in and doubled and the end of the circle was lying on the reef where the water was only a few inches deep. It wasn't until the net had come right in and the circle was small that we suddenly saw hundreds of fish madly rushing from one side of the net to the other. Parrot fish — they look almost transparent silvery white in the water. Schools of them rushing and leaping and flinging themselves at the net, just realizing what was happening to them. And the maimai, the brown fish the ones whose spines are poisonous and are painful or make you sick or die I don't know which — and then the beautiful fluorescent yellow and black angel fish, the strange square fish and the spiney blown up round fish that sucks in water. Hundreds of them, mostly parrot fish and maimai wild in the now small circle of the rau. After it was doubled and tripled in places and secured by rocks in the shallow water, the men went in with the big coconut husking knives and steel rods and proceeded to slaughter the fish. Our job was to pick up the killed fish and put them in sacks and Thomas and Earnest would carry sack after sack out to the small motor boat that had fed out the rau... There seemed to be thousands of dead and dying fish, some slipped and wriggled out of your hands. As the numbers were reduced they'd use a bit of the rau to pen off the rest and the slaughter continued. They told us not to pick up the maimai because of the poisonous spines. We were, I think, on a shallow part of the reef that went from the motu across the lagoon, out towards the main reef. If you looked up you saw the waves crashing over. The old Mama was busily tearing apart fish and eating the fat — she offered me some but I couldn't...

Finally the last sack was carried. The sea was awash with blood. Simon and Thomas and Earnest and Ben rolled the rau up and hauled it back — a long long way it now seemed to where the two sailing boats were anchored, from where we had started. I wade back with Eileen, a young part Rarotongan girl from New Zealand who had come over on the Mateora with her Aunty. Wading through the water I wondered when the sharks would come as everyone said they most certainly would. But we reached the boat without seeing any, Eileen gnawing on raw fish, piled in the rau and set the sails while we watched the other boat with Martha and Nigel in, raise its brown sails and fly away like a beautiful silent bird. Then us — the white spinaker at the front and the big brown triangular sail, old and patched from use, both full and billowing and moving silent and swiftly across the turquoise waters. We were exhausted. Thomas, big fat Thomas lying on top of the rau and Eileen and him cheeking each other and us all eating bananas and bread and drinking coconuts and the sharks now dark shapes in the water following the boat and snatching at anything thrown overboard. And Ari with his fish in his pocket, the old brother at the tiller. It felt so good just sailing there, the work done.

Sailing back towards The Island — the relentlessly hot white island, the coconut palms all blowing and divided fronds and shimmering — Ben said they looked as though they are all pressed against glass and they do. The fish unloaded, divided between families, a wooden table of one family in the sea, some cut, others pull out the guts with their hands, others rinse and throw into the big woven fish baskets. It seems that everyone on the island is there. Each family getting its own share of the fish — the children picking up the fish livers to put in a separate bowl. The fish — parrot fish — were taken then, gutted and cleaned to the big stake tables under the coconut palms by the beach and John and Ake were there with knives chopping off the heads, opening the fish to put them in the smoke house by the house, to smoke till Monday, and dry to send on the Mateora to all the friends and relations on Rarotonga. They can only sell the fresh frozen fish and they only take the rau out when a boat is passing through to send the fish.

It is night. I sit between Bob Mason's wooden house with C.A.O. outside the veranda and John and Ake's house. In the evening they teach Ben Maori words — tahi ngauru ma tahi — means eleven, tahi ngauru ma rua means twelve and so on. I remember bits and John always says I will pick it up faster than Ben. All the stars are out — the iron pot almost directly overhead. Tonight I told Ake and John about the farm in Masterton where I grew up — they were polite, I don't know what they thought.

My writing is so behind, I cannot keep up with events and write them down and get it done and go and do something else. I don't know why I do this at all — but something always brings me back to it. Ari wanders by and asks me if I can see in the dark. Ari is 18 and lives by Helen's in Rarotonga — he touches my heart with his beautiful singing and guitar playing. I always like being in his company though we don't talk much to each other.

Before, yesterday, I was still writing of our first night here. Going through the night

on the sandy road to where Grand and Danny lived. There the whole living space is a platform all covered with many pandanus mats and open on two sides. In the middle was a heap of little old old woman, a small figure with this happy wizened toothless smile — Danny's mother. And there she sits, every day and her family look after her, fetch and carry for her. Another old one we met that first night was the father, 85, who sits also, in this house opposite here. Sits in a chair — he hurt his back in a hurricane, and his family look after him. When the boat comes he gets his bottle of gin and swears and curses in the most filthy language, I am told.

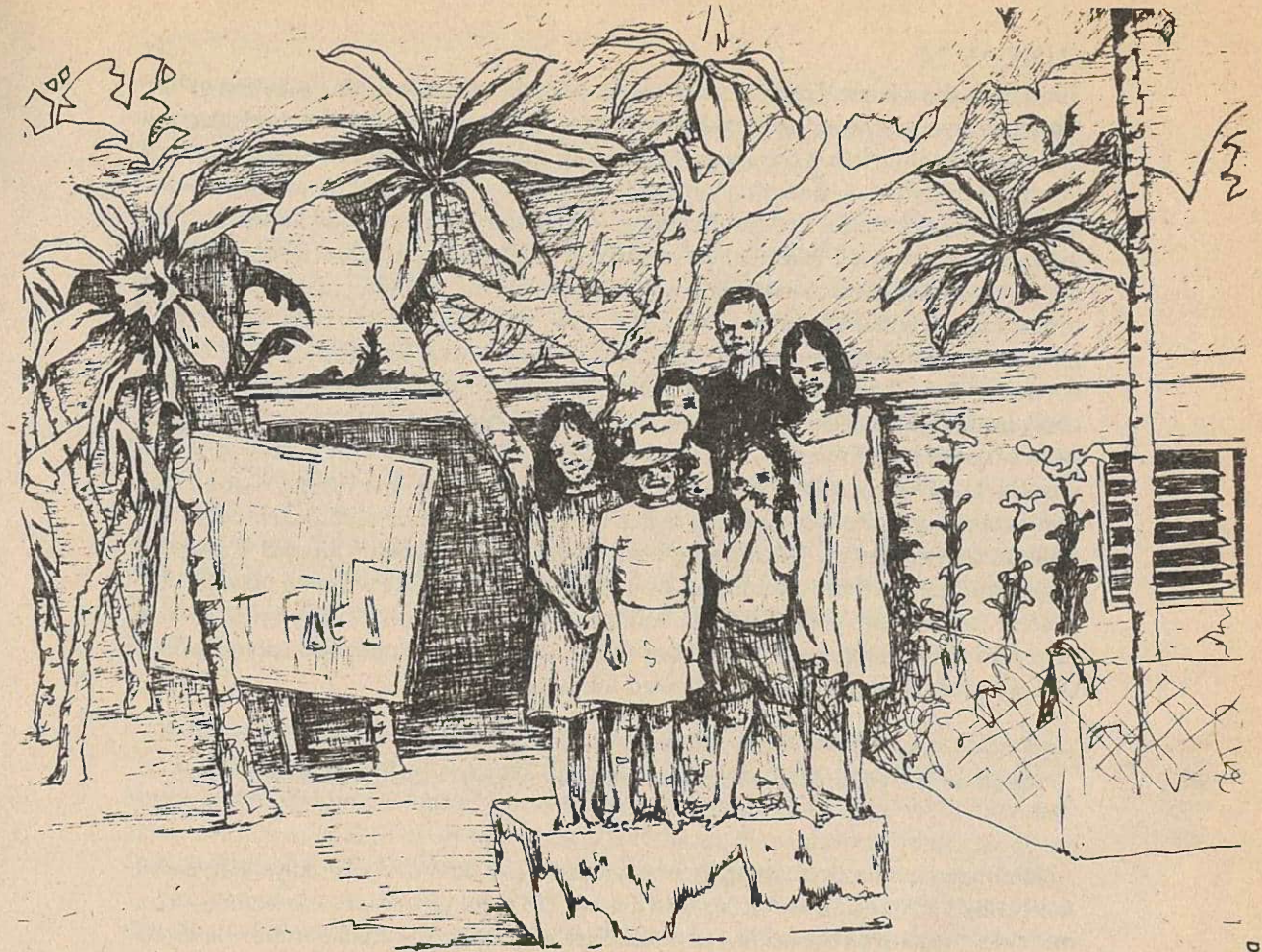
Yesterday afternoon I am with Jane and Ti, the old Mamas — yet in this society they are not the old ones and are mostly like naughty young girls. Ti's grey hair falls down her back, past her bum and she plaits it and curls it round the back of her head. They said the last time they wove was in 1945, before I was born, and when they left The Island forever. The mat was of wide pandanus and it was nice just to be with them. The shed was filled with pandanus and the coconut leaves they use for the big fishing baskets. I want to make one. They said come to the motu with us and spend the night next week. Jane, a wicked cackling old one, told of going with her father to the Maori mission in Ponsonby when she was 14 where the RC's helped the young Maori girls, new to the city and in trouble. Since then, they lived in Rarotonga and in New Zealand, but never back on The Island.

That evening, the dance. At dinner, the jokes at John and Ari, how they were off to get a fox. Then the loud tape deck in the shed and the boys in the shadows here and the girls in the shadows on the other side. All incredibly young and shy. Then finally late, some dancing. The Maori music, but this formal fox trotting except for Thomas doing a bit of hula. Strange in this concrete shed with the big water tanks, the yellow light bulb and the big fancy tape deck. Strange. Like a Bible class dance. We wandered home and slept, exhausted from the day.

Tonight, a walk around the island — the big red crabs all walking down from the bush. Jimi whistles into their shells to get them out, for bait. The chanting Bible singing from Jane and Ti's house with the old man and the lesson and prayers and Our Father when we came home.

Ake and Tikeroa — John and Ake's son's children who they and Sari raise. He, the son, lives in New Zealand. Strangely serious children already versed in the labours of the island. Tikeroa, the fisherman, the worker — a sweet boy and Ake always helping Sari in the kitchen, already utterly self-effacing and accepting in her role of constant labours in the kitchen. Tikeroa, a plump black-eyed boy showed me his turtles, chopping up the pauas to feed them. He knows all the fishing — many times, he says, he's laid the rau with the men, already a man. Perhaps he's nine or ten.

Night. It's cool at last. Sari and Grand chatter in the kitchen. The night generator faintly chugs, a cicada somewhere but never a chorus. Each day holds so much I feel I



am born again but then think of the many small deaths. I love these people and want to know them more. Flora and Mariana know the children, are always taken up with them — swimming, fishing, playing basketball — seeing, learning so much.

SUNDAY 24

Sunday — day of rest. Today we don't work, we don't swim, we don't play the guitar. We sit and we can listen to the church service on the radio if we like. Early, we are woken by the church bell clanging and clanging, then the strange chanting Bible singing and then hymns — beautiful forthright, harmonious singing. At breakfast we learn Maori — it is wonderful and I am learning. John is sparkling eyed and hilarious — he asks us no'o ean koe? Where have you been? The bread is raveorai opuhe, kare — no, ai — yes, it is good to learn. Ben writes it all down but I'd rather just pick up what I can. It's also a communication point and we can all laugh and talk together on their ground. Flora and Mariana are off in a little girl huddle with Matavea and Ake. Grand is cutting Ben's hair under the coconuts. We walk up from the beach through the coconuts and the wandering chickens and the stake pig pens and the coconut log pig pens with the half domestic half wild looking pigs. The church bell tolls — four services today. The old falling over church is exquisite inside. The ceiling shaped like the rectangular bottom of a boat in match lining painted wood and under, round the walls small squares of match lining each in opposite diagonals around the whole church and above them a board all around painted with red and green flowers. The austere wooden pews, the open arched shutters and a pulpit halfway between the floor and the ceiling many feet above the congregation, of polished carved wood. One wonders what missionary contrived the pulpit.

We sit on the veranda — talk laugh tell stories, always the jokes at each other.

John, young John from Mangaia who came on the boat and who stays with Ben's Aunty Blind in Mangaia — Ari, Ben and me went to a church service. The women sit on one side, the men on the other. I sit at the back with Martha — all the women have the beautiful finely woven hats with brims and the little girls, the exquisite little woven hats with the shallow crown. They have on their best dresses, clean and ironed, some with bare feet. It is incredibly utterly hot — women with fans fan themselves and I sit and stare out the open shutters with the painted flowers — old and faded in the arch of the window. Outside the blue glittering sea and the green coconut palms softly *shshsh*, it might be Jamaica. Nigel, Martha's husband is the only other European. Most of the service is in Maori, I sit in the heat and let the lilting words wash over me. The minister stand behind the table and not in that formidable pulpit. At the start of each hymn an old woman begins in this high ringing whine that fills the whole church — it brings tears to my eyes for some reason — then the women all join in — a piercing whine and the men answer. Often they're all singing different bits at the same time, harmonising — it fills that small church and the whole island outside. The front windows are nailed up with rusty corrugated iron and the side wall beside me is visibly leaning — I notice but this is neither here nor there. After the service the old mamas go to their house and start the chanting singing again.

MONDAY 25

All day yesterday the singing — all day and into the evening when there was another church service. The whole island might have been an order of priests and priestesses chanting to the gods.

I sit on these wood seats by the sea under the ironwood trees. There is a cool breeze off the sea delicious in this unrelenting scorching heat. Flora and Mariana and Ben swim by the box of baby turtles. They have a huge turtle shell they're playing on from a turtle dead or killed just this morning. We have just returned from one of the motus, where we went to get mature coconuts, the brown ones for the oil. Melvyn handled the small wooden boat and outboard for Grand, Mariana, Flora, Jimi, Ben and me and we motored through the deep turquoise lagoon that you could see down down into, the boat cutting that calm surface of the water. It rained, cool sweet drops on the flat marbling surface of the turquoise water. We motored between the coral heads growing like trees from the deep bottom of the sea. Flowery brown fingers beautiful lacey in the water and the brilliant blue parrot fish (*uu*) feeding on the top, its back out of the water. The clams (*paua*) with their iridescent lips deeper on the rocks.

At the island we take sacks and wander through the green forest of coconut palms with the wild arrowroot underneath. It's hot and wet, smelling tropical, like the glass house in the Auckland Domain. Hot and damp and green but the palms are spaced apart and it is easy and lovely walking and picking up the brown coconuts, the ones you can hear the water shaking in. Grand calls us. We bag the big nuts and Melvyn husks them on a long steel spike with a spear end and throws the nut left into a sack. We sit on the mountain of husks from the past coconut gatherings and watch. Everywhere are the small brown lizards, geckos, and when we first arrived the palms are alive with *kaikawa* birds, small white white birds, so white and graceful they look like the dove of promise. Melvyn husks the nuts with speed and ease unappreciated until Ben and I try and succeed with great effort and time. It's extraordinarily hard but a knack that Grand shows. And Grand and I wander off and get a green nut and sit on a fallen coconut palm by the sea and she shops it with her big sharp knife and we drink. The water is the sweetest I've tasted and we sit and talk and drink, and wait for the the others. Melvyn who's young with frizzy brown hair and strong and devoted to Grand, gets some drinking nuts to take back and husks them and we drink more and Grand tells how when she came to The Island she was slimmer than me and how she gradually grew fat eating the coconuts and drinking the water. And there's big fat lazy Jimi who won't work. The girls swim. Back through the turquoise waters, the coral heads, the fish. Half close your eyes and the green water marbles white and green in patterns of light before you. The sun burns. They say it is a good day to catch the turtle and we see one a few feet in front of the boat raising its strange old head for a breath. Melvyn speeds up, it sinks. He says the ones tied in the shed — they're going to let them go. But Ben says one is already dead. Flora and Mariana and Jimi have a baby turtle out that they're playing with here in the water. They're neat little creatures. The nuts are carried up and dumped in the cook house.

Sometimes I wonder how many days until the boat comes and then you know, the sun, the sea, the sand and these people are within you are the sound of the coconut trees and their green shade and the sound of the waves breaking over the reef and the children (and no traffic, no shops) have enchanted me and leaving is unbelievable. I do a form of Tai Chi before breakfast and feel the sea and the wind in the dance. These brown people move slowly — everything has its time, intense work — long sit. Much being together and much space between. In our small blue and yellow striped house of four or five rooms in all, many of us live easily. Grand and Danny and Jimi and Ari sleep on the veranda and John and Ake and Tali, the baby and her mother Sari, sleep on thin foam in the big concrete floored lounge with the garden in the middle. They pick up their beds every morning. And John and Thomas and Tikeroa and Ake — the children, sleep on the back veranda, then me and Ben, Flora and Mariana in our tiny back room by the water tank. At 5 a.m. Ben goes fishing with the men on the reef — this morning they catch nothing. They're in the water with a big 6 foot shark, Ben tells me, and throw a few rocks at it so it won't tear up the net.

All afternoon sitting in the wooden boat in the lagoon a few hundred yards from the beach. Ari and Melvyn getting the paua, diving in the clear water. I jump in and divide the crystal water with my two arms and look down to the clams, some very big, with their iridescent lips, and the pink and purple forests of coral. Cutting the black gall of the shellfish, once Aunty Grand had cut it from the shell. She like a queen with her boys she orders about. Two hats on, gnawing at the clams and some raw fish, some coconut, bananas, she chops open a drinking coconut. And of course her packet of Rothmans in a plastic bag — she's smoking away. The small boys come around. Melvyn spears some fish with his gun. We get a bucket of the paua and fish for tea. Everyone is at the beach swimming, diving, picking the paua. The young girls are there singing — Ari mimics them.

The white chooks wander around pecking at the coconut husks, shells that lie around. The small crabs in pretty shells crawl on the sand, even up on the road by the house but then that's only a hundred yards from the beach. I am becoming bewitched by this place. The smoke house still smokes, drying the fish that we caught in the roi on Saturday.

Last night we sat on the veranda looking at the clear sky and bright stars. Nights are long, we stay up savouring the few cool hours. We eat dinner at 9 or 9.30 p.m. and sit about until midnight at least. It's nearly then before Flora and Mariana go to bed too. You have to wait till the heat of the day is gone. Grand says last night that sometimes they see the shooting star with the long red tail that stays in the sky for perhaps three nights. They say it is a sign of royalty — arriving, or giving birth... Mariana cannot believe we see the same stars as the ones at home are seeing, Flora has seen a UFO the night before. The nights are gentle and warm and a good feeling from the exhaustion of the day. Sometimes standing in the road at night looking up to the clear sky with a million billion stars I am pervaded with the miracle of it, being alive now, at this moment on earth, having this split second of life given to see the earth and the stars — then gone...

Later we dress and go and lie down on the wooden benches by the sea. It is at last cool, the shadows long, the big shiny tape deck on the copra racks playing the fast Maori music. The sea and sky have paled — the tide is out. Thomas and David come in in their boat bring six or so groper, great apricot coloured fish that they will freeze and send out on the Mateora.

TUESDAY 26

Tonight we have been here a week. I open my eyes in the morning to the wide blue arc of the day, the still green waxy glitter of the sun on the coconuts and the leafy breadfruit with fat fruit hanging. No wind, it is hot and will be much hotter, so hot that walking across the unsheltered road will be like burning up in a fire. For hours last night I lay sleepless and wandered outside for the smallest sea breeze. Mariana came with me to swim and I do a form of Tai Chi at the end of the beach in the brief morning shade of the leafy green bushes. Ben was already out fishing on the reef at 5 a.m.

Last night dinner was delicious, more delicious in that some of the paua we had picked in the day was served in a sauce, cooked, and some in a 'salad' mixed with coconut juice and tomato. This with rice and sweet juicy fish. The food takes on a different reality when picked in the day and your whole body feels clear and weary and hungry. After, Ben and I walked around the island in the dark with the torch, around the beach and the red lobster-like crabs with their big old shells on their backs literally covered the beach. The new moon, I have not seen it yet. For some reason I await it expectantly.

Evening. The new moon, the very first new moon, a thin silver curve in the pink and black clouds of sunset. We look at it from the beach in a kind of heathen worship. A different time when the moon is rising, a creative time.

Today we made the oil. An incredible scene. Beneath the coconut palms out from the veranda by the smokehouse, Ben painting a black power fist on David's motor of his motor boat. We bring the sacks of coconuts, the small stools with the long end with a steel grater on it and put them in the shade. Many children who have gathered help pull the fibre off the outside of the nuts so it won't fall in the gratings. John whacks them around with a big knife and tips the water into the bowl. Jimi and Ari and Melvyn sit on the stools and grate into huge aluminium washing bowls, their big flash tape deck playing an odd selection of old songs — Kenny Rogers and Cher and then the Maori music which is best. Grand emerges and with a piece of sacking wrings the grated coconut handful by handful into another great aluminium washing bowl. Thirty or forty coconuts. It sit with Grand and wring too but I am slow and it's hard work, but the white cream flows out and it's nice to be there with everyone and the music and the singing and the talk. And for hours they grate and we wring the shredded coconut and throw out what we've wrung and all the children are around being yelled at to fetch things and do this and do that, only lazy Jimi won't — and all of us on the pandanus mats underneath the cool shade of the coconut palms. Then it is done, a huge aluminium bowl of white creamy milk, that might be goats milk, and everyone drifts off — to sleep after the hard work. We pour it into a bucket and we find a big pan like a camp oven to cook it in. Grand and I go picking the miri behind the water tank. It grows wild there and we pick the green tips — it's strong smelling, a bit like catmint or pennyroyal — a whole bucket of green tips. Down past the smoke-house we dig a hole in the sand and put the iron bars across and light it with dry coconut shells that burn bright and fast. The husks from the coconuts we've used are burned because that is part of the medicine. Helen told me that it wasn't many years ago in Rarotonga

that people were arrested for using the Maori medicine, now it is accepted and often sought after by the medical doctors.

Now we're down under the coconut palms with this fire in a little hole in the sand and Grand is sitting on a kerosene tin stirring with a big iron skillet and we're lying on a mat talking and Flora and Mariana and Ake and Tikeroa are feeding the fire and fetching old coconut husks lying about. They see how high up the sloping coconut tree they can climb — nearly to the top, it's a small one growing sideways. For another few hours the big pan with the cream and the miri boils and boils and gradually it turns to the clear oil — green with the miri. Grand boils it until it's all green with just the miri and white scum to be taken out. We leave it to cool in an aluminium bowl, sloped to allow the oil to drain from the miri, and go off to sleep or to swim — it has taken all day in the incredible heat...



WEDNESDAY 27

Woken this morning by the church bell — clang clang — Wednesday morning service and the beautiful singing. Slept on the floor in an attempt to be cooler but still a long time lying awake in the heat. Sometime before dawn it rained, cooling the hot air — a release for a few hours. Tonight I'll bring a mat and sleep down here by the sea, crabs or no crabs, we should have slept here every night...

We bottled the oil in old gin bottles and perfume bottles that we can find. I walk with Grand through the tipani trees and the houses to the old man's house to find any spare old gin bottles, and then to Danny's old mother's house where the outside walls are all kiko and propped up like open shutters on sticks. She, a wiry wizened old thing, usually seated in a formidable lotus position, is wandering about, doing childrens' hair yelling, as spry and as alert as anyone. She asks me if I am lonely here

and I say no, there's everyone about — but I wonder? I am still an observer locked in my own Papa'a world. My English is very different from theirs. They miss out many words — hot, the sun, pours down the rain. But a lilting expressive speech and so much more in tones and face and hand movements. I love to hear it.

Grand sleeps on the bench beside me, tired still from her labours yesterday. Jimi, Flora and Mariana are floating about in the lagoon on the green glass balls that get washed up on the beach here from the Japanese fishing nets.

Evening. We have made our bed down here under the casurina trees by the sea and apart from the smell of the pigs nearby, it is cool and beautiful. The brilliant new moon is up and the stars are out and the sea roars softly on the reef. In the afternoon Sari sat down by the boat shed making kiko brooms. She plaited the hairy ends of the ribs of the coconut fronds, four together, plait, four together, plait until the plait was four or five hand spans long with the kiko ribs sticking out of one side, then finally she would plait in a piece of string that would tie around and round the whole broom when it was finally rolled up. They're neat, the kiko brooms — Grand loves threatening anyone from small children to grown men with them. Sari sat plaiting, and her baby waddled about the place with her black curls and flat monkey face and strange eyes. She made friends with me at last but when I asked Sari if I could take her to paddle in the sea, she says — no, that's not the way of my parents. And she was not allowed, Sari said, because of a skin rash, but I don't know. Tikeroa and Ake hardly ever go swimming either. One is never quite sure.

Then the fishermen come in the boat at 4.30 or 5 p.m. and everyone jumps to life. I am handed a huge crayfish still creeping like a big red and blue spider and a long rope with fish shoulder to shoulder the whole length of perhaps 15 feet or so. The fish are all taken up to the cookhouse and there the umu is prepared. Everyone works. I am given the easiest and most undemanding job as they indulge me as a rather delicate helpless child — washing the cut-up fish while Sari cuts. The children gather wheelbarrow loads of coconut husks for the umu and endless buckets of fresh water from the kitchen and sea water. Grand makes small woven kiko baskets for some of the fish, with a big frond draped over her knees and Melvyn scrapes down the coconuts which Ari is given the task of husking. Gathered around the cookhouse on the sand under the coconut palms we work. I go to Sari for a pot for the fish and she is scouring it and then begins on the blackened outside. I tell her it doesn't matter about that and she says — you don't mind? Some Europeans move their arms and their shoulders and their mouths — and she demonstrates a sort of shudder of horror — bad, that's why we always apologise for our cooking. I try to tell her, convince her, I don't know if it's enough, the right words. We pick all the black squashy bananas that are hanging by the smoke house — the ones from Aitutaki as there's no bananas grown here. Grand is wringing the shredded coconut meat for the sauce and we peel them put them in an aluminium bowl for banana puke. Grand pushes squashy handfuls of them into some of the little baskets she has made and ties the tops of them to go in the oven.

THURSDAY 28

Waking to dawn on the beach. A night of stars and the sound of the sea and needles of casurina hanging down and the strong smell of pigs. We slept though. The dawn sky, a mass of pink and blue and grey-black cities in the sky. Jimi and Grand and Danny already down the beach. Escaped along the cool shady beach and chant and do a form of Tai Chi for the new day. Me shaky in mind and body — my usual uncertainties, conflicts.

Ben drawing a big black shark as a pattern for Grand's tewaiwai when she asked for mermaids and little fishes. Flora and Mariana hopefully drawing pretty mermaids. Today they paint the school house — small building in the bush, one room for 10 children. Ake and Tikeroa start school on Monday, and Jimi. We tease him — we're going to be swimming all day while you're at school.

I go with Grand to Danny's mother's house to see them preparing the rito. On the platform covered with mats, different kinds of woven pandanus mats, the old mamas, including Danny's old mum, are seated on the mats with great hanks of rito before them. They're slicing the end off each piece to pull the waxy side off. It is almost unbearably hot. I try to cut and tear as they are doing and cannot, and cannot really be bothered. The small flies irritate. The old mamas irritable yelling at the small children hanging about. I am glad I don't have to do it — the weaving. It is hard, the cooking, the great aluminium bowls of washing, the children, then the weaving. Suddenly I couldn't bear it and had to walk away and was glad my lot as a woman is different.

The shadows are long on the beach at last. A faint cool breeze relieves the extraordinary oppressive heat of the day. I have struggled with it all day. This forest of green palms flicker slightly in their slatted green against the innocent blue sky. My God, I could lie down and die with the heat today. The old turtle that had been tied on its back was dragged through the burning sand to the sea to be tied there. It looked sick and weak and tried feebly to flail its own way through the sand, but Jimi dragged it and it must have been heaven to reach that cool water again.

And again I went back to see the ladies stripping the rito. The fine waxy bit, transparent and paper thin stripped off the leaves and put in the aluminium bowls of water. If not for my mood, it could have been encouraging. The old woman making fans and the mamas and young girls stripping, babies and toddlers about, staring out of large dark eyes and the old man helped out to a chair in the shade. The young girls washing the rito and taking it to cook and bringing it to be tied up like a long hula skirt to be hung and dried. But all seemed unreasonable and incredible labour to me when in fact it was done by them with ease and devotion and an ancient patience and acceptance that I do not possess. At least Martha could not do it, she said.

Later. The clouds like big white birds above the great half moon of the horizon. Grand laughs when I say it's hard work. We sit on the veranda. She describes the preparation of the pandanus which is infinitely harder — picking it from the island, bundling it into sheaves, roasting each leaf over a fire, 200 or so for a mat, dry it in the sun for three days, putting it in rolls and pounding it. My God! Then weaving the mat — two and half days work perhaps. If to sell — \$40, \$50. She laughs and looks like a little girl.

FRIDAY 29

In the lounge before breakfast they tell us of the island council. John sits on his bed, a single bed with bright green ends and talks softly. He is a wild looking man when I look but fine with his dark brown skin and grey hair and huge belly though his body is strong, not the flaccid pot belly of city men. But his warm smile and sparkling eyes and soft voice always make you think of him as a kindly gentle fatherly man.

Again this morning woken by the bells. More disastrously so, as we have moved our sleeping paraphernalia from the immense starry beach to the concrete water catchment which is open but rather like a prison with a light bulb glaring. Taro is there weaving a mat and the papery rustle of the pandanus goes on all night. Finally it rains, torrential tropical rain, cool sweet, breaking a tension. Then Ben wandering round in the dark finding if anyone was going fishing which they weren't and then the bells. And as the catchment is next to the church doors we had to scabble our unseemly selves up, me wrapped in a cotton bedspread and quickly remove back to the bedroom as the people dressed in their clean white best appeared.

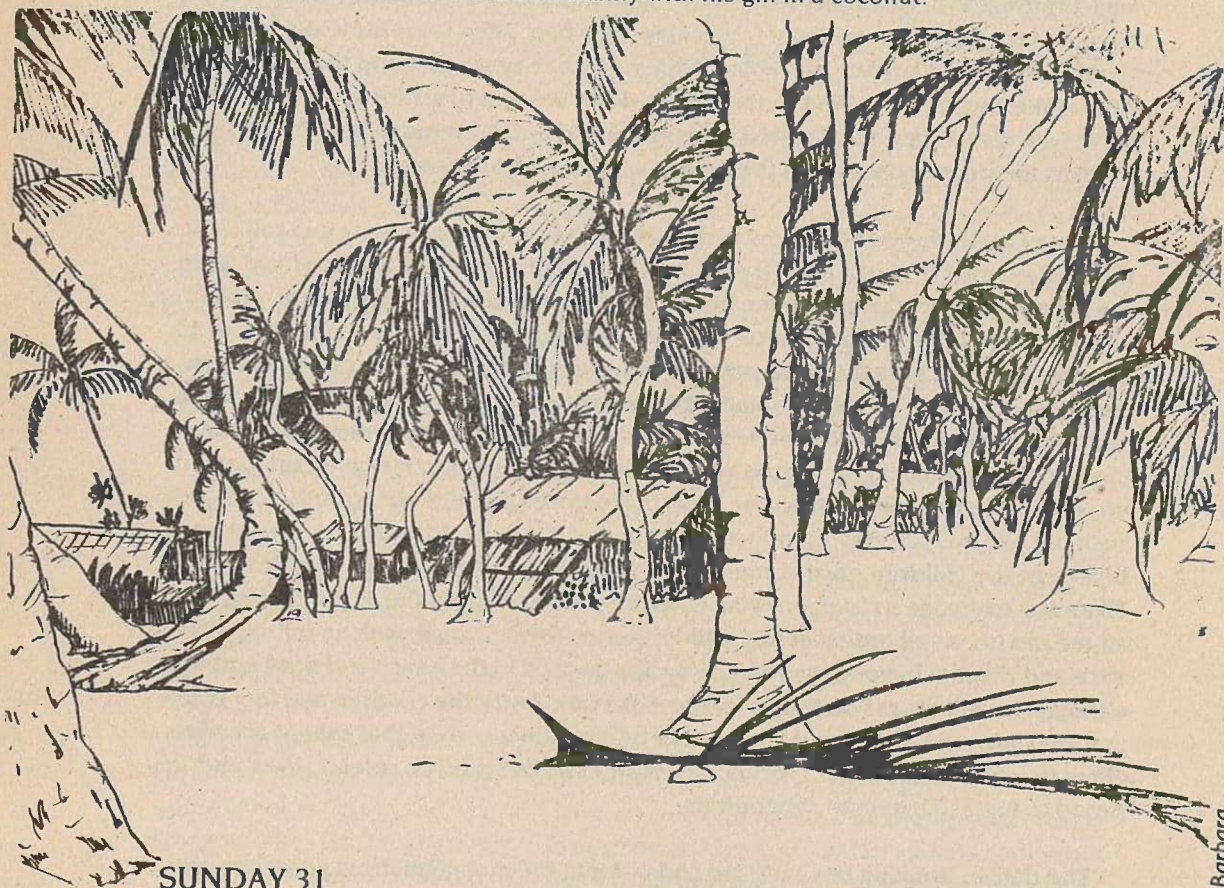
All day yesterday, as all day every day, Ake and Tikeroa must stay within call of the house. Ake must be 6 or 7 and Tikeroa 9. At 5 a.m. in the morning Tikeroa must wake the fishermen, carry the nets to the boat. Then the endless jobs of the house — carrying the water from the tank across the road. All day he minds the baby who is 18 months or so and gets the paua, scrapes the coconuts for the sauce, feeds the pigs. Ake must always be on call for small jobs and one never sees them swimming in the sea. Tikeroa perhaps, before he is yelled at. Ake — never. If they play, their grandmother yells at them in her witchy voice and if they have a toy, they are told to put it up. They have no toys but then the boys make incredible little boats and bows and such but Ake was slapped for playing with Jimi's rubic cube. At night when the church bell rings the children must come and sit down from playing or running or talking. Tikeroa is everyone's slave, bringing trays of coffee, putting in the sugar, stirring it — all the old ones yell orders at him and he carries them through with an infinite patience and wisdom beyond his years. Lazy Jimi goes off to the beach and does nothing although he will always do things for me. I like being with the children and feel sorry that they are such slaves but I know I am different in a society that cannot afford to allow its children idleness. Tikeroa has wonderful deep black solemn eyes and is proud to me of his infinite capabilities.

The dance. Drinking beer and gin and water in the moonlight from yeast jars with the boys. Ladies strictly not allowed but sidled in for a gin and some sweet music they play. Then they're drunk enough, courageous enough to dance. This time everyone goes, everyone dances and the concrete water catchment becomes quite gay and dizzy. Danny's very drunk, doing wonderful solos of his own special Maori dances in his black stove pipe trousers and ming blue shirt. He looks neat. Grand dignified, tries to ignore him, waltzes around with Sari. They are a wonderful pair of ladies; their hair done with flowers, their brilliant dresses.

SATURDAY 30

Out by the islands picking the paua. Cutting from the shells, cutting the black gall out. Down in the clear water grey sharks circle. Thomas and John unperturbed — they don't attack. The coral flowers yellow, light green pink and purple. The sun is hot and for hours we move from coral head to coral head picking — John diving, Tikeroa pulling the boat here and there, finding the clams. Ben and me cutting. Three buckets. It's hard hot work — Thomas hungover — it's good to come back and sleep. Lie on the veranda and read love comics and war comics till tea.

A beautiful barbeque at David's for all of us going on the Mateora. Heaps of fish and donuts and music. And Uncle Danny with his gin in a coconut.



SUNDAY 31

Bell clanging early. Church, church, all day. The singing, preaching all in Maori. Children in clean dresses — their hair done — beautiful, their shiny black hair and dark skin. No guitar playing, no swimming, no work. People visit each other. A day of no work is necessary. But the day is rigid — Victorian almost in its restrictions. We sleep, we slip off to Duke's pool and sit in the water. No-one is on the beach. It rains and then it's cloudy, soft cool breezes. We read and sleep in the cool. The sea egg spine in my foot hurts, I don't feel like doing anything. Tomorrow Ben will dig it out no matter how much it hurts.

Sitting in the yellow kitchen around the long table, a cool wind blowing through. John talks of the whale with great fear. Tells of a night anchored beyond the reef, a whale rising up lifting the boat, sinking again — after that I stay away from the whale.

MONDAY FEBRUARY 1

Rain in the night. Torrential tropical rain. No-one knows about the boat. Even the owners can't contact it. Thomas wants just the boys to get clams. Wander about — talk to people, the old mother's house. Watch Jane and Ti making their oil. It's cool, sometimes raining, the smoke rising through the coconut palms.

Grand tells me how Akari, the dark Indian-looking girl of 12 or 13, is pledged by her mother to look after her grandmother till she dies. She wants to go to New Zealand but her mother says no, not till the grandmother close her eyes. Such a powerful authority scene of the old people.

Pass the time with Aileen who's about 15, singing with the tapedeck on the beach — When Will I See You Again. Ask her if she goes to concerts in Auckland but she says — my mother says people smoke dope and get drunk and violent and I'm not allowed. She's nice and probably her mother is right anyway. John and Ake sit in their green boat on the glassy grey-blue water of the lagoon, silently and peacefully cutting the paua out of the shell and throwing them over the side. The white waves explode on the horizon and I look expecting to see the big rocking Mateora, but no. Today the children went back to school — they go from 8 to 12.30 because they are needed at home to work. I feel it is time for us to go home too and Flora and Mariana to be back at school.

Bill's beautiful smooth-faced wife breast feeds her plump third child in the water catchment. She has a strong carved face and says — these people are brought up to work, work, work. Jane and Ti are making the baskets from the split coconut fronds, one on top of another. It looks difficult. I have not the conviction to learn it but it's nice to talk with them. I feel that now I am beginning to know people — them breaking through the regard for me. For that I would like to stay but in a way, one has one's own life, own culture or sad lack of it, and I guess you are always an outsider in the face of their generations here.

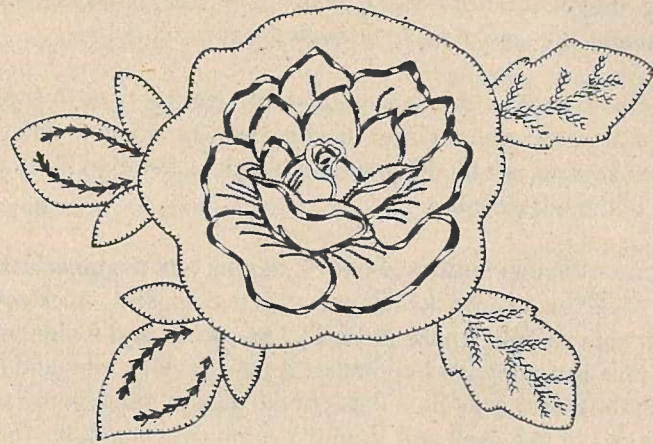
The palms and bread fruit trees are still. The small children very dark and beautiful, play on the road, the chooks all with tiny fluffy chickens following cluck about. The Maori music on the tape deck — the boys drinking gin behind the church, Uncle Danny on a drinking binge again.

At night a big fight. All of them drunk on the sweet home brew made from the fruit of the pandanus. Ari and Thomas wanting to punch each other. Fighting on the road. All the others trying to stop it. A black night drizzling rain, but hot ... drunken men on the dark road. Ake calling from the veranda. Ari swearing obscenely. They move off. Ben there in the middle ...

Taro wanders by. Ngatiri following, traipsing along behind. Little Ngatiri who sobbed when he first saw me. Little dark-eyed, dark skinned baby in his little dirty dresses that Taro puts on him. He fell asleep on me today in the water catchment. I could love him. Always wandering in the road somewhere, a bit lost Taro gone somewhere.

I wonder what pictures I will have of this place when I leave ... The orange net curtains festooned across the slatted windows and the big tree growing in the lounge like

Xmas, Flora and Mariana and Matavea wading in their dresses in the glassy lagoon today, the trees — pandanus and palms with hundreds of crabs climbing ... So many incredible things ... so much I cannot begin to write.



TUESDAY 2

Flora beautiful with Danny last night as he sat in the lounge drunken and raving. She says come, when he holds her arm and won't let go, come down to the boat and see what they've caught. So clearly, so authoritatively, so unperturbed by his drunkenness. He goes with her as obedient as a child. She wants badly to go home — I feel for her.

We hear now that the boat has left Nuie - arrives here Thursday morning. Grand rubbing great aluminium bowls of washing — I go and hang it out. The usual long washing lines of clothes, strung between coconut palms waving in the wind. The roosters crow. Earnest and David sitting, playing guitar and singing, Grand sits and smokes. An infinite capacity for hanging out, talking, singing when the work is done. But you wonder what happens here as the young people drift away to Australia and New Zealand and those who have to stay, stay but talk of going also. Only the parental authority keeps them. John has six sons in New Zealand and Australia and only Thomas remains. The wind — rain, it is cool. Grand's photograph album this morning — an old photograph of Ben's grandfather, barely defineable. A recent picture of Ben's mother — a big dark heavy looking woman. Photos of Grand and Danny, young — neat photos. Danny looked like Sam Ford in his stove-pipes and hair slicked back. Always a smooth dresser. Grand a sweet big island girl with a hibiscus in her hair. Each day is filled with strange moments, capsules of infinity stretching us, transporting us. It pours — the children run shrieking, delighted with their fingers stretched out.

The dark, more than half a moon. The children eating first at the table tonight — full of fish and Sari's white bread made in the umu. Nothing since breakfast — they are starving. In the evening before dark the kids all play baseball on the road — I nearly wrote street. The teacher calls this part of the island the town. He lives in the bush where the pandanus grows and the taro patches are.

WEDNESDAY 3

As always on Wednesday awake to the church bells, hymn singing. Fall out of our hot little white room to breakfast. Ari, Thomas and John waking on the back veranda, just outside our room, from their mats. The tapes start playing. Flora and Mariana get up from their mat on their small piece of floor in our room. Breakfast at the long table in the yellow kitchen, the grimy unlined walls painted all yellow and the concrete floor and the old black gas elements in one corner. The partition hiding the bench and a big steel sink that water has to be carried to from the communal tank across the road. Most of the cooking is done in the umu though, a hundred yards or so towards the beach. We eat mostly silently, fish and rice, bread and coffee. Mostly the same food for any meal — everything with coconut sauce. I clean up and do the dishes, a bucket for the sink, a bucket for an aluminium bowl to rinse the soap from the dishes. Always Grand comes and washes her face and hands in it even when the dishes are in it. She's grumpy because Danny's been drinking and then saying things in front of everyone that annoy her and I know she wants the boat to come so she can move into her old home and unpack all her boxes. Danny loped about yesterday with a pareu around his waist, a towel with a nude girl (back view) draped rakishly around his shoulders, and a blue painters hat, a bit pissed I think, being smart to Grand and zooming off on his motor scooter (the only vehicle on the island). It was very funny, but Grand's gone into non-communicado.

Ben and me washed all our towels and sheets in one of the big aluminium bowls that are the mainstay of existence here, over at the water tank where the miri grows. The tanks are big concrete affairs that look like round risen loaves of bread with small pits under the tap, concrete-lined. They are major scenes in themselves, like a village well. You get buckets of water there, wash clothes there, shower there — everything. There is a bathroom but it has only a toilet which water must be carried to for it to flush and you must take a bowl of water in if you want to shower in private i.e. in the nude. So you never go in there. The usual long drop toilets down by the beach. Well we scrub away at our sheets and towels and talk of the boat coming and going back to Rarotonga and New Zealand. We feel we have imposed a long time and are still really outsiders, strangers to the household except for sometimes, and they will be glad to be just themselves again. I wish for a good feeling on this last day — if the boat comes as expected.

Flora and Mariana return from the beach with yet more beautiful shells. Incredible colours and shapes — they whistle the crabs out, they come out halfway and they're promptly grabbed and pulled out looking very naked with their soft back exposed. They then climb into anything — bottle tops anything they find. Exquisite shells. My half coconut shell of poreo that I had buried in the sand for a week for the fish to rot out, sit shining.

Jane sews on an old treadle in the water catchment. Ti lights the umu to cook the sweet nut to take on the boat. You chew the sweet caramelly outside. Danny's mother Serah, sits on her mat weaving fans. We talk of the boat, of what they are doing — never beyond that. Ake there, baby Ake with her dark face and eyes, beautiful in the way of very old Maori photographs... The bigger girls husking the mature brown nuts on the iron spike. The rain falls, the smoke from the umus rises through the coconut

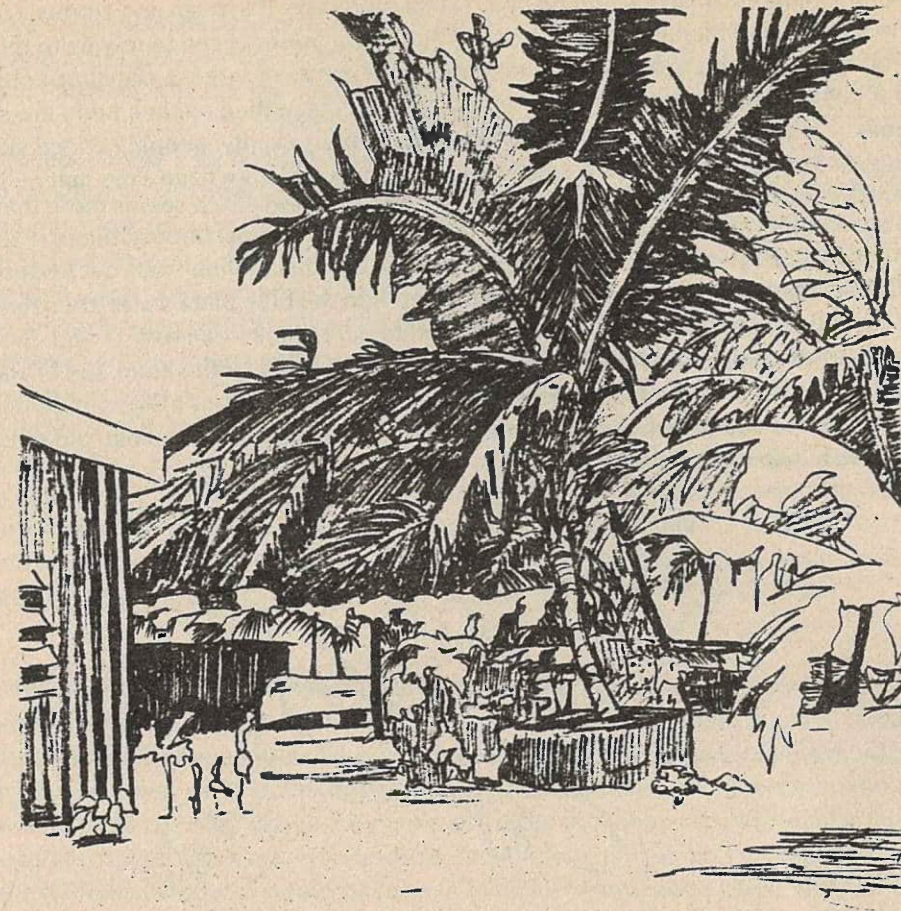
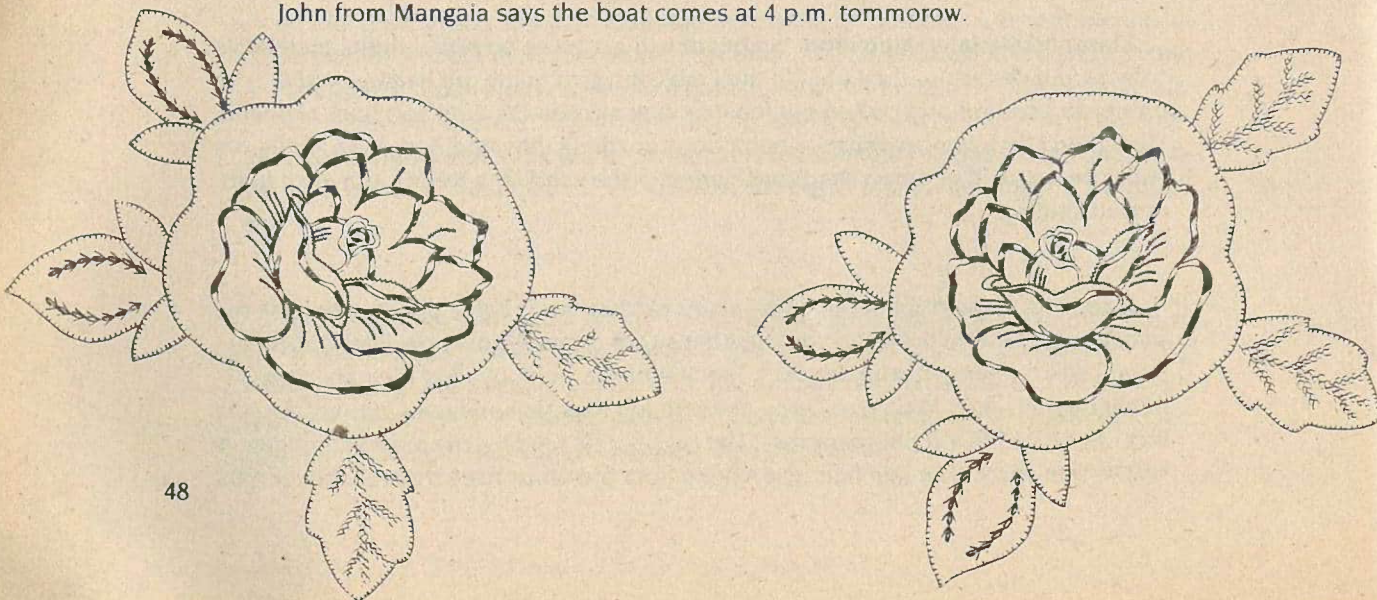
fronds. The sea looks dark and stormy — I wonder if I should make some food to eat on the boat.

Night-time. The rising moon, a big wind, the palms huge and mysterious in the moonlight. Ben and I reaching an all time low this afternoon thumbing through an old Australian Woman's Weekly, an extraordinary find, reading recipes and looking at pictures of delicious avocado and mango salads and almond biscuits. Talked about food and what we felt like eating for hours. The diet of almost exclusively bread, fish and rice and coconut sauce for every meal is having its effect. The rain too, and nothing to do, and a waiting on the whole island for the boat. Big cabin-biscuit tins of paua dried to send. An event on the island since it usually only comes every 2 months.

I cooked up some beans on the fire in the cookhouse with Sari. Sari was grating coconuts. The wind driving the smoke in, and through that and my pouring eyes we talked. Of New Zealand mainly, tomatoes and lettuce and broccoli, things I missed, other things. It was nice to talk with her after those relentless boys and their tapes. She told me of the hurricane 4 years ago with the palms whipping and bending their fronds to the ground, on one side then the other. Of it lasting nine days and old John having to call Rarotonga every half hour day and night. He has a certificate of merit on the wall for it. Of running through the palms before they whipped down upon you. Of the dried fish and pauas for all those days. When the wind shifts to the west she said, then you know. To talk with her restored me. Her capacity to patiently do the work before her. When all my family are here I cook for many more people she says. Needless to say none of the adults ate my beans. It didn't matter, Sari said she hoped the boat wouldn't come tomorrow.

When I see the girls in their old fashioned dresses come to read the notice of the dance it seems like a mission society, the church, the Victorian missionary influence utterly dominating. A repressive Xtianity. Old Bob postpones the dance for one reason or another, the young people obey.

John from Mangaia says the boat comes at 4 p.m. tomorrow.



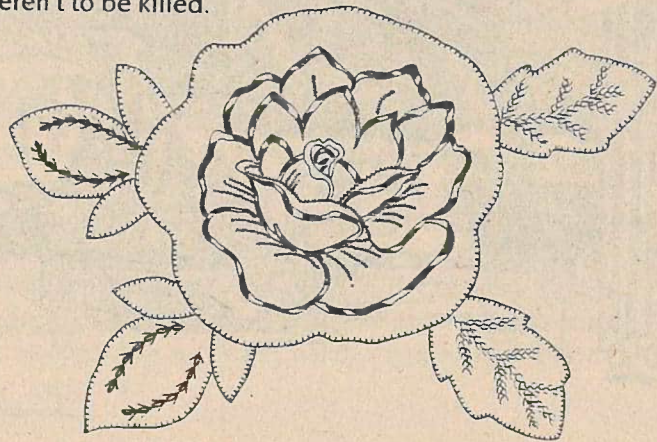
Barbara

THURSDAY 4

It pours with rain. The coconut fronds stream like hair. Puddles and small streams course their way along the sandy road. In our tiny room we play drafts and snakes and ladders with Flora and Mariana and Jimi. The boat is due at 4 p.m. but reaching it in this teeming rain by motor boat would be miserable to say the least. Much less a wet oily deck to sleep on. John, Sari, Grand and Ake have the flu and lie about sneezing from diving for clams in the rain, yesterday. A miserable waiting time seems to have set in... A small wet chicken sits in a coconut shell squeaking and going to die in the rain. I foolishly brought it in. It will probably die anyway. The water tank outside the door pours a great fountain of water from a hole in the side. The drum set to catch it is overflowing.

FRIDAY 5

On the Mateora, heaving and rocking, riding big swells. It's rough and stormy. I lie between Ben and Mariana, both feeling ill and Flora asleep. I can barely write this, the boat is rolling so much. The worst I feel is moments of intense claustrophobia under this fish-smelling canvas, but the possibilities of getting out in a hurry are so remote — over piled suitcases and luggage and about twenty sleeping or sea sick bodies — I have to ride it out. A small hell really but at least we have a dry mat to lie on which is better than last time. I have the flu and a period which seems more than enough to cope with as the toilet is right out in the storm almost impossible to reach without ending up in the sea with the boat rocking like this... When I look out towards the cabins that whole end of the boat sinks deep into the blue black water, then rises way up into the sky. The spray is pouring in on to our canvas — *whoosh* — and on to the turtles that lie at sea level on this side of the hold. Big turtles from The Island taken live to Raro. To be killed there. One has its head and front wings out waving them when the sea rises hoping to swim away. They are beautiful strange old creatures I wish they weren't to be killed.



SUNDAY 7

At Helen's at last. But so much of the past three days and no time to write it. On Thursday 4, finally the boat after 4 in the afternoon. The storm, the rain, the sense of waiting and then the boat out beyond the reef rising and falling in the big seas. Nobody wants to go on it now it's so rough. We stand on the beach and watch the ship with a sense of foreboding. Danny has to go out first because the boat has come from Pango where there is a bad eye disease so if it's on the boat, no-one from the island will go on only the passengers. Danny returns, no eye disease, but no passengers till tomorrow morning. We are relieved. Today before dark they load 10 tons of copra. All the men, all the boys carrying sacks of copra from every shed and kiko house on the island, wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of sacks go down to the beach. The small boats loaded up — out through the passage, incredibly rough and treacherous with the huge waves crashing on the reef, to the rocking Mateora. Till nightfall the copra is loaded. On one of the boats, a young girl Taila is swept overboard while the boat is by the big ship, she swims around the back of the boat, an instant later the boat whacks against the side of the ship.

But all this I did not fully realise until we went out the next morning. Everyone on the island was down at the beach to say goodbye to all of us leaving on the boat. The sea is rough but not stormy like the day before and it looks as though it might clear up.

WEDNESDAY 10

Am lost in lovely lush slow Rarotonga and forgetting to finish this writing. The strong image in my mind that last morning on the island, almost as strange, and unreal as that evening we arrived. It is the old mama Serah, Danny's mother, sitting on her pandanus mats crosslegged in her small heap, the wrinkled skin of her bare arms hanging, her withered breasts long beneath her faded old cotton frock. There she sat with one of her daughters, both weeping and weeping. Danny's mother, her eyes red and full behind her black rimmed and many times magnifying glasses, on that platform under the staked up kiko walls of her house. And her daughter seated on the edge of the platform. Flora with me, seeing for the last time, these women and their lives, this house, the kitchen with the floor of coral stones. Serah beckoned me and I kissed her goodbye and she put a necklace of seeds and shells around my neck and Flora too. Then, though we had never talked much or known even what to say, I would have stayed and called her mother. It seemed unbearably sad, leaving in a moment of recognition. Flora and me walked away in tears. We will never see her again. And still I am reminded of the tiny old Japanese woman in a movie I once saw... left lying on her grass matting floor, wailing and alone, in her hut in a forest of giant bamboos. The English woman reporter who came to know her and write her tragic story, became also a daughter for the old woman... but finally she must return to her own culture...

The goodbyes on the beach by the kiko boatshed and the copra tables, the turtles, the children swimming. Waiting for the last boat, Flora and Mariana already gone. We kiss everyone — everyone we have known and not known. Many times I hug Grand. I love her, despite her coolness of the last few days. Those people who are now family. As the boat leaves they wave and there they are on the white sand under the forest of coconut palms — their whole lives there — and we go. I am filled with unbelievable sadness and would have then jumped off and gone back. Sari and Tali and John and Ake and Grand and Danny and the others all there waving and waving and we wave back till the last.

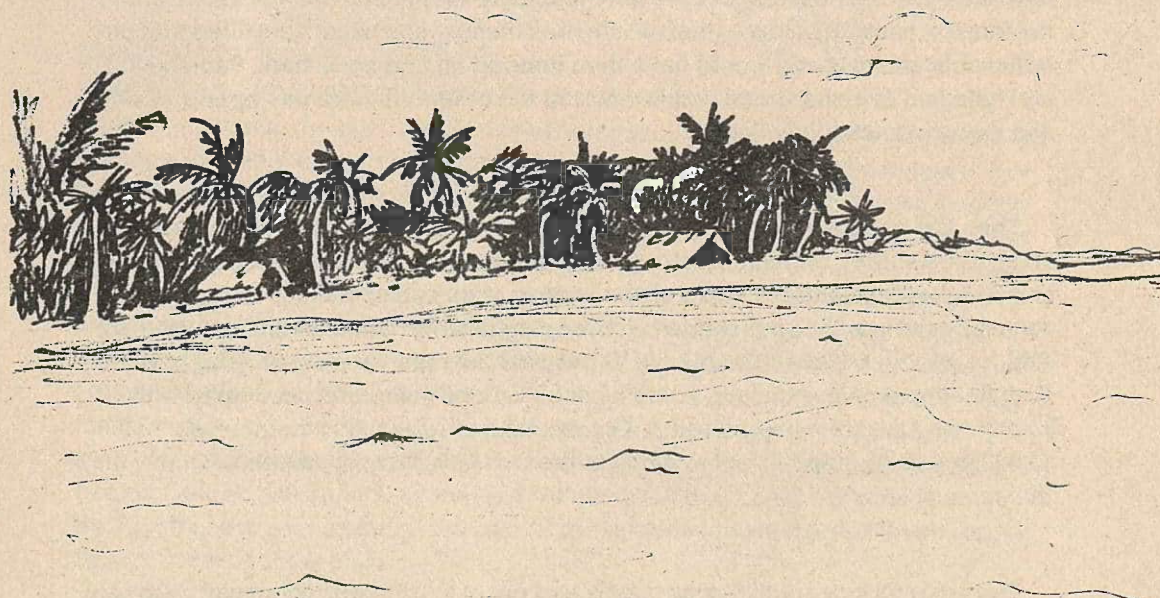
Then the passage, the reef. Huge waves crash over. We wait and then motor like crazy to try and fly through before the next big breaker bursts over the reef. We're grasping baggage and the sides of the boat as it rocks and crashes and then over comes a wave into the boat, over all of us, our baggage, our camera. Hold on! Hold on! And we grip till we reach the big swells out past the reef. We pick up a bag of white flour floating. Not long before, David's boat has been completely swamped with all his flour and sugar for his family lost. Drums of diesel too and his motor snapped off. \$1,400 dollars of supplies for his family in the sea. All his copra, months of fishing for that money.

The great rocking ship, rocking hugely and out of rhythm with this small churning boat. We struggle in. The small boats leave. The big ship sails away. We wave goodbye from the top deck.

The storm at night. Mariana and I sing songs lying on the mat under the tent on the deck to try not to feel sick. Mary, the old mama from Otara gives us coconut puke wrapped in banana leaves. It's nice. The next day, all day we sit on the top deck. I feel unbelievably ill from the terrible flu that everyone had on the Island. We sit with Martha and Nigel on the fishing boat on the lower deck waiting to sight Rarotonga — we have to make it there before 7 p.m. or we must spend the night on the ship. I feel I'll die of pneumonia if I do. And there, a shadow in the storm clouds, Rarotonga rising — a huge mountain range in the sea. It could be New Zealand, it could be the Coromandel. Now we watch. It takes hours — three perhaps, to reach it. We watch Rarotonga, beautiful Rarotonga become gradually clearer, slowly, slowly and we're motoring up outside the reef at 1/4 to 7. Only just in time.

Many people on the wharf. Us all feeling like hell. Unloading. Ari's father there. Our bags in his truck — rocking and dazed and sick and Avatu wharf like New York after The Island. All the big baskets. The turtles turned on their backs and loaded on the trucks.

Ari says to come with him . . .



Barbara

RETROSPECTIVE

She invited him.
He — an exotic vine
(As was her taste)
Grew lush and sinuous
around her.
Bright bouquets
Of red and orange flowers
Pungent and dripping
Burned in her head
And in her heart.
Bursting like fireworks
In the heat they created.
And their golden fruit
Ripened in her womb.

It was too late
When she felt
the soft vines harden.
Cutting at her throat,
Manacled her wrists.
When she twisted and turned
The bright flowers distracted
Concealing them.
How lucky! their friends said.

And when she tried
to chop and hack
Bits of herself came away.
As she no longer knew
Where he ended
And she began.

At last, quite still,
She sat.
Painstakingly she began
To untie the knots.
Carefully pulling the thick tendrils
From around her,

Wrenching them
From inside of her.
(If she broke one
It again would begin to grow).
And the blue and red and orange
Blossoms in her head
Began to wilt.
But as the tiny buds faded
She longed for flowers
In her heart again.

Much later
Still picking at the hair threads
Lodged in the fabric of her being
(Again mistaken for herself),
She looked up to see
The torn remains,
And wondered what it was
She had wished to save.

Julie



Jude

womin born
 womin grown
 can you feel a movement deep within you
 womin like
 womin kind
 force emerging through the folds of youth
 inspiring life
 womin like
 womin kind

Neighbours

Lora Mountjoy

SHE WOKE FROM A SLEEP murky with half remembered dragons. The children still hadn't stirred, carefully she slipped out of bed, pulled up the barely ruffled covers. In the kitchen, turning her eyes from reminders of John, she filled the kettle, plugged it in. It was dawn, but the kitchen was cold and dark. Who would build a house like this, blind walls to the sun? She opened the back door and a pencil of light appeared on the kitchen floor.

Later, hot teacup cradled in her hands, she leant on the door jamb, watching the sunrise, ignoring the small snuffling cries which meant the baby was waking. The hill on the right was bright with the new sun. Halfway up, the felled pinetree still smouldered, black smudge on a pale slope. At least he was not abroad at this hour, old Rex T. Anders, and she could stand there at ease, unobserved by either neighbour.

Not that she ever saw the Mortons, or them her, though it was through them that she and John had found this strange corridor of land, with its rare bounty of a house to rent and grazing for the horses. Good solid country folk, the Mortons, glad to help a family into a home, she wondered if they'd noticed she was now alone. Probably not, their bush block butted her land, and only occasionally one of them, a figure in a swandri, came to check the pump in the shed just over the fence.

She thought, too, about the daughter for whom this narrow strip had been sliced from the family farm, wondered if she had felt trapped by the gully, pressed hard against her past. Like the rising wail of an approaching siren, the baby's cry pulled her back into the cold house. She put down her teacup and scooped him up. "Last of the line," she murmured, holding him close.

Later, with the older two at school and the inside chores done, she took the buckets and went up to milk the goats. She had her head buried in Charlotte's warm side, squeezing the last drops from her freckled bags, when the dog barked. Even before she glanced up she knew that he was there, an agile leprechaun, tacking up the slope. She waved and he raised his grubber in salute.

"Old Rex T., he's just a man, a harmless old man," she thought, trying to convince herself, but somehow his presence above her on the hill had upset the precarious balance of the morning. Charlotte, sensing her chance, stepped sideways and spilt half the milk. Ewan had managed to crawl up the steps, and stood on the other side of the gate, triumphantly clutching the second bar. She wouldn't be able to open it without pushing him over. A stab of panic, the fear of losing control, tightened her belly, but it passed, and placing the milk carefully on the fencepost, she climbed over, then retrieving both bucket and child, walked swiftly to the house.

The old man moved from weed to weed, grubbing the tiny rosettes. He was making towards the blackened stump, still licked by occasional flames, trying not to look over the fence, where blackberry scrambled down the banks of the creek, and thistles readied themselves to flower.

"She doesn't understand, that lass," he commented to himself, "she doesn't understand that if you let it get away there's no stopping it. Ragwort, pennyroyal, buttercup. Then there's the native scrub. I remember when there was little else but bush, except on the sea,

that is. Now there's a place where a man could always find some peace, on the water.

Reaching the charred corpse of the tree, he turned to look at the river, which wriggled like a gutter worm down the valley. The tide was just starting to ebb, and a small squat fishing boat ran out with it towards the harbour, that silver glint in the distance.

"Lucky buggers," the words flowed through his head as he piled branches of drooping needles against the glowing trunk, "lucky buggers, they won't sleep at home tonight. You wouldn't guess, looking at it from your Jap cars, or your highways, just how broad a stretch of water there is out there."

He stood still for a moment, memories flooding back. Of a certain light which came when the sun was low, when colour drained out of both sea and sky, and the horizon disappeared. "Might be worth taking up fishing," he thought, "just to get out there again. Not that fishing's my game, can't stand white gumboots."

Chuckling at his own joke, he threw a handful of dry needles on the dormant fire, setting it suddenly ablaze, then lifted the grubber and swung at the ground. A hunk of scorched, yellowish clay jumped out and lay on its side, startling the cat who had been feeding on fledgling birds, easy prey in the fallen branches. The cat leaped in the air, rolled over, then streaked down the hill.

"What's he doing, stupid old fool, doesn't he know that's how you cause erosion?" She emerged from the house again, lugging the bucket of spundry nappies up to the line. Ewan lunged to her right knee, making each step a cripple's shuffle. She could feel it getting to her again, that trapped feeling, that panic that she had to control. He didn't help either, old Anders. Maybe he was some sort of wierdo, always spying on her, his bare field hardly needed such intensive care.

"Morbid thoughts," she cautioned herself, "it's dangerous, thinking like that." She knew she had to do something, force herself into action.

If only she had a garden to work in, the garden they had planned when they first shifted in. She had even started it, digging over a small patch, planting silver beet and parsley. Then he had come back and told her, that it wasn't just the forestry contract that took him back up North, that he had been staying with Trisha, that she needed him.

"And me, and the kids?" she had yelled, not helping matters, screaming and sobbing. He had been embarrassed, had made promises, said it was only for a while, to work things through. Then he had gone, ejected himself almost, and now the days stretched into weeks and the balance in her P.O. Bank book shrank. In some ways she was coming to terms with it, occasionally enjoying the space to herself, freedom from his heavy moods, but the garden had suffered. She couldn't bring herself to tackle it again, and the weeds grew up till they hid the seedlings, and the grass and puha got so long and lank it was an increasingly daunting task to begin again.

Sometimes she pretended he would come back again, as if it had been a bad dream, and he would dig the garden, and she would puddle in the lettuces. Then she would bring out fresh bread, and jam from the boysenberry vines, and he would make coffee and they'd smile together and watch the children.

But when he did come he only stayed for a day, and spent most of that in bed, exhausted, he said, by the travelling and work, complaining at the children's noise and claims for attention. "Trisha's little girl is so well behaved," he'd said, and she had taken the children up the back to get pinecones, to hide her tears from him. When she came back down he had gone, taking the car, leaving a cheque which would keep her for another month.

So though she was all right for the moment, supported, housed and fed, it left her in a sort of limbo, and the uncertainty stopped her from telling the new friend she had made here what was really happening, stopped her from making plans. Now, too, without the car, she was more trapped, reliant on the infrequent bus service to get to the shops, to visit Pam.

She couldn't face the garden, and it was too late to set off into town, but she had to do something, some action to stop the thoughts. Thank God for the horses. Picking up Ewan, she went to the porch and unhooked the back pack off its peg. Ewan chuckled as she stuffed him into it, swung him on her back.

It was a stiff walk up to the top paddock, but worth it for the view, for the feeling height gave of being above it all, above the house and the road, the scrubby mangroves by the river. The horses were warm and welcoming, standing as she fondled each in turn. She had a strong urge to ride Tosca, to push her flat stick up the ridge, but Ewan's constant presence made it impossible, made it dangerous to let such thoughts linger.

Instead she walked slowly on up to where she could see the harbour, that mysterious grey sheet of water, her prize for climbing the steep clay path. She could see all the way to town from here too, and when the cream and red school bus began its stop start journey home, she sighed and started down the hill. At the gate she had to fend the horses off, but she managed to squeeze past them, then took a short cut through the pines, testing her balance on the planks through the squelchy buttercups.

The children had beaten her home, were already locked in their room, TV turned up loud. When she opened the door they didn't look up, but Jed, the oldest, waved his arm.

"Close the door," he ordered, "Don't let Ewan in." She grabbed him by the ear and the collar, pulling him into the kitchen, shouting "Don't you talk like that to me," wishing it were different. Under pressure he looked her in the eyes, promised to do his jobs "later Mum, after this programme, its a neat one." She compiled, shutting them in again, taking the baby off her back, plugging in the jug.

By the end of the day the glint on the horizon had turned into a sandy smudge as the tide rolled back to leave wide stretches of mudflat. The old man checked the fire one more time, took a last look at the harbour, liking the clear stretches of mudflats, tidy to the eye. Mangroves, now, he didn't go too much on mangroves, but they had their uses, and they didn't use up good land. The sun sidled towards the low horizon across the valley, adding a texture of shadows to the bare clay banks so that they resembled crumbly cliffs, the sort pockmarked with kingfisher holes and held together with wiry pohutukawas.

He paused on the brow of the low hill which screened his whare from the neighbour's house and looked back. She was taking down the washing, arms whirling like a dervish. The little one crawled towards her, he could hear it screaming, noisy little bugger.

"He's up there looking at me again. Doesn't he have anything better to do?" she was careful not to speak her anxiety aloud, conscious of Jed slouching past with a bucket of scraps for the compost pile.

"When'll tea be ready, Mum, I'm starving."

"Soon, soon," she promised, but he stumped inside, emanating disbelief.

Later, when Ewan was in bed, she sat by the fire and read the story Maria had brought home from school. It was her "lucky book", a tale about some children who lived next door to an old woman who was really a witch. When it was over they sat in silence, looking at the flames, the kids leaning in to her. The moment felt so right she almost couldn't bear it.

"I wonder," said Maria at last, "I wonder if he's one."

"Who? What?" Jed's questions jumped at her.

"A, you know, wizard. Old Rex T. I mean. Like in the story." Jed swelled with big brotherly scorn.

"Old sexy Remy? Huh, shows how much you know. Old sexy T. Randers a wizard! Gee, you're so dumb."

"Don't talk like that, Jeddy." She hated it when they behaved that way, that heavy bravado talk, and the implications of the nickname created a cold hard spot in her belly. She paused and the words, when they came, seemed thin to her ears, "Why do you call him that? Sexy Remy? Poor Mr Anders!"

"Aw, Mum, all the kids say that — you know."

She did know, it was harmless namecalling, a game for bored children on a bus full of wet raincoats. But in bed, turning over and over, it swam up again and again. Sexy Remy. No smoke without fire, they said. Sexy T. Randers, surely it was in the children's minds, not his. But why did he spend so much time up there? He must know she was alone. If only John were here. She imagined him, curled next to Trisha, his protective arm wrapped round her. Once she had conjured up this image, she couldn't dispell it, and the battle to do so devoured her emotional reserves until she felt she was going crazy. She got up and made a cup of tea in the strange white kitchen. 2 a.m., sitting by the table, staring at the dead ashes, she imagined that figure on the hill watching her through the frame of the blindless window. "Let him," she thought defiantly, and drank another cup of tea before going to bed, to sleep fitfully till dawn, when the cries of the baby sucked her back to consciousness.

The routine, the predictable schedule of the morning, gathered threads scattered by the night, and the expectations of Jed and Maria fleshed her out, filled some of the crevices. But when they had gone it was just her and Ewan again, sitting on a chair by the kitchen table, vulnerable liferaft in an unknowable ocean.

She closed her eyes and looked around the house with her mind, seeing spotless floors, shiny lino, carpets without a scrap of fluff. In fact, it wasn't so much worse, a little duller, a pile of dirty clothes, some toys. But the judgements, some undefined depth of work undone made her edgy. It was hot outside today, that very first hot day of spring. Nothing else really needed doing, the nappies already flapped in a breeze which caught the ridge but left the back lawn settling into a pool of heat.

She put the baby down and walked out to the wooden steps, carrying a cup of tea. By the time the drink was finished Ewan had reached her, was clambering up her legs. She stripped off her jersey, but was still too hot in tee shirt and jeans and longed to undress completely, to expose her winter skin to the sun. Up the back, past the goats sunning their udders by the macrocarpa, a familiar figure headed up the ridge to the scrub boundary. It was no use even thinking of sunbathing. Her only swimsuit was a provocative leopardskin bikini, bought two years before to compete for John's roving eye on the holiday beaches, hardly the sort of view to give old Rex T. She rolled up her jeans to her knees.

The old man watched through the screen of wilting pine needles. "She's alone, like me, I know she is," he decided. "Mortons said there was a couple, but I hardly ever seen him, even on weekends. Course he could be a seaman but I don't think so. Doesn't come and go regular enough. He's not a fisherman, that I know, I can tell a fisherman a mile off, something about the shoulders." His glance swept across his own land, the clear, uncluttered hillside, to where barbed wire barely contained a jumble of blackberry vines. "She needs help, woman like that. Too much land to handle on her own. That boy of hers is lazy too, doesn't even mow the lawns. In a way I'd like to help her, give her a hand, but I wouldn't know what to say. Trouble with living by yourself, when you meet a person its hard to think what to say." He had moved down the hill a bit, half thinking he would offer his services, but she got up abruptly and went to inside, and he continued around the hill instead, grubbing thistles, enjoying the sun.

Inside was unbearably cold, and she only stayed long enough to change into a summer dress and pick up a book before going out the seldom used front door, to sit on the front steps. She was in full view of the road, but didn't care, better than having his pervy eyes watching her every move. The mail came, a giveaway paper and a letter for John from his mother. She resisted an urge to open it, to know whether she knew about Trisha, what she would think. That was unlikely though, it would probably be the usual minor complaints about John's father, news of the family, love to her and the kids.

It would be interesting to write to her, telling the truth. "This is how your son behaves, how he treats his wife," but even while she thought it out she knew it to be a waste of time. What was scandalous behaviour in someone else would be excusable, forgivable, in John. She understood, had forgiven him in the past and probably would again if he came home contrite.

If only she really knew how he felt, what he was doing. She wanted the sun to bleach out all memory, all pain, as it had done when she was younger during long days prone on the beach in a sheen of sun oil. But now there was Ewan, climbing on her back, grizzly because he was tired. She stood up, to take him to bed, and saw the unmistakable figure of Rex Anders walking purposefully towards the gate. In one movement she wheeled inside, slamming the door.

Silly, she was shaking, and the old fellow was probably just going for a harmless stroll in the sun. Ewan went down easily, and she walked from room to room, peering out of windows, seeing no-one. Inside the house she felt safe, but foolish locking the doors then lying down, trying to retreat even further, to reach the sanctuary of sleep.

She must have succeeded, because when she woke again it was to Ewan's cries and by the time she had made him a bottle and herself a hot drink, the kids were home from school, knocking on the door, confused by the unexpectedly barred house. It was good to see them, she didn't even mind that they dived for the TV, avoiding her questions about school.

He walked back along the road. It was too hot for an old man to be walking fast. The house still looked unwelcoming, shut up, so he walked on by. Still, it had been an outing, must be months since he had walked around and yakked to the boys on the sand barge. They had asked him if he wanted a ride, "Show us where you want to be dropped in the drink when you cark," said that cheeky young fella Taylor. "I'll take them up on it one day" he decided, "but they'll be disappointed if they expect to have a hoolie over my dead body in the near future. Fit as a youngster, probably fitter than those kids who never go outside. Wonder why she rushed into the house like that, strange lass. Modest, too, and just as well. All sorts of things happen these days." The fat priest who drove along this road often, pulled up and offered him a lift.

"Thanks father, but no, I'm almost home." He might as well be a priest himself, no woman in his life for years. At home he had a glass of water, then another. It was a hot day. Going outside again to the toilet, he caught a whiff of smoke and continued on up the hill, to check the stump.

For some illogical reason, having Jed and Maria home made her feel more secure. She took Ewan and headed up the fenceline to the pines. "I don't know why he's burning down that tree," she thought, "there's a winter's firewood in it." It was hard to pick the logs up, with Ewan on her back, but she managed it, taking not only a fallen branch but an old fencepost, excellent for kindling. It was as cool under the pines as in the kitchen, but so different. The quiet caressed her, and Ewan laughed as she kicked a heap of pineneedles into the air.

For a minute she thought she had a visitor, heard a car, but it didn't come in at the gate. Probably someone turning round, they often did that in the driveway. Before going down to the house she stood by the macrocarpa and looked across the muddy riverbank to a paddock splashed with yellow. The audaciousness of that massed band of buttercups cleared her mind a little in the way she had hoped the sun would do, so that she felt only a small jolt when she found John coming out the back door to greet her.

"Hullo," she said, "Home again, eh?"

"Sort of."

"Oh, what does that mean?"

"You'll see." There was a hint in him of a stranger, something in his manner that threw her slightly. She walked past him into the house and took the baby off her back. He cried when she put him on the floor. John frowned and she picked Ewan up and held him on her hip.

"Do you want a cup of tea?" It was all she could think of to say.

"I don't think I'll have time."

Suddenly she knew this was it. She didn't seem to be breathing, her eyes and ears seemed stretched wide open, her body taut like an animal in danger.

"No time," she said carefully, "then why did you come?"

"To get the kids. They're packing now."

"This one too? she queried, handing him Ewan. He ignored the gesture and she walked past him, out the door and onto the lawn. He followed.

"Now look," he started, "you've had a good deal from me. This isn't a good situation for kids. You've just got to accept facts"

"You bastard!" She screamed so loud it hurt her throat. "You bloody bastard. How dare you, you and your bloody whore." It was a word she had never used before, whore, and the strange sound of it made her pause a second.

"Don't freak out," his voice was raised too.

"I'll freak out if I want to. You walk in here calmly and tell me you're ripping off the kids, and you expect me to say OK, fine, take this box of biscuits for the trip. Oh you are a bastard," she was reaching full volume again, and Ewan, who had been stunned into silence up to now, joined in with a full-throated shriek.

John grabbed her by the arm, she pulled but he held tight. With Ewan on her hip she was even less able to defend herself than usual.

"Leave me alone!" She hadn't known she could be so angry. He released her suddenly and she stumbled and fell, managing to hold Ewan safe, but bruising her hip on the wooden step. He watched her get up.

"Come inside," he demanded, suddenly calm and reasonable sounding. "Come inside, I'll have a drink after all. Make a cup of tea and we'll talk about it." In the kitchen he plugged in the kettle while she sat at the table, watching. She felt ready for anything, as if a massive current had burnt out all her normal responses, her fuzzy connections. She was so used to yielding, but this time she knew she would fight to the end.

"You won't get away with it."

"I don't see why not. You should be glad to have them off your hands, you complain often enough. Trisha loves kids."

"Is that so? What about Jed and Maria, do they love her?" She rose swiftly and walked towards their room, but he grabbed her, pulling her back, forcing her into the chair again. Ewan was crying, clinging to her and his unchanged nappies made a clammy patch on her clothes. For the first time since the nightmare began she considered his winning. Slowly and with deliberation, she put the wet, noisy bundle on the floor, fetched two cups and poured the tea.

The old man had checked the fire and was on his way back down when he had heard her shout "You bastard" so loud that for a second he thought she meant it for him. But when he turned and looked there were two of them, squawking like gulls. Then he remembered the car, their car, parked outside the gate, and the woman who didn't get out.

Still, none of his business, he supposed and turned home again, but from the corner of his eye he saw her fall against the steps, still holding the wee one. A hot flush of anger surprised him, he had an urge to go down, to intervene. What could he do, though, an old man like him? they said, too, that the women didn't thank you for interfering. But even after he had put the hill between himself and them the scene stayed with him, obscuring the late afternoon sun.

Talking got them nowhere, and she could feel her clarity slipping, as he piled superfluous arguments and snide abuse on the unassailable platform of his physical superiority. She asked why he didn't want the baby too, and he muttered about babies needing their mothers.

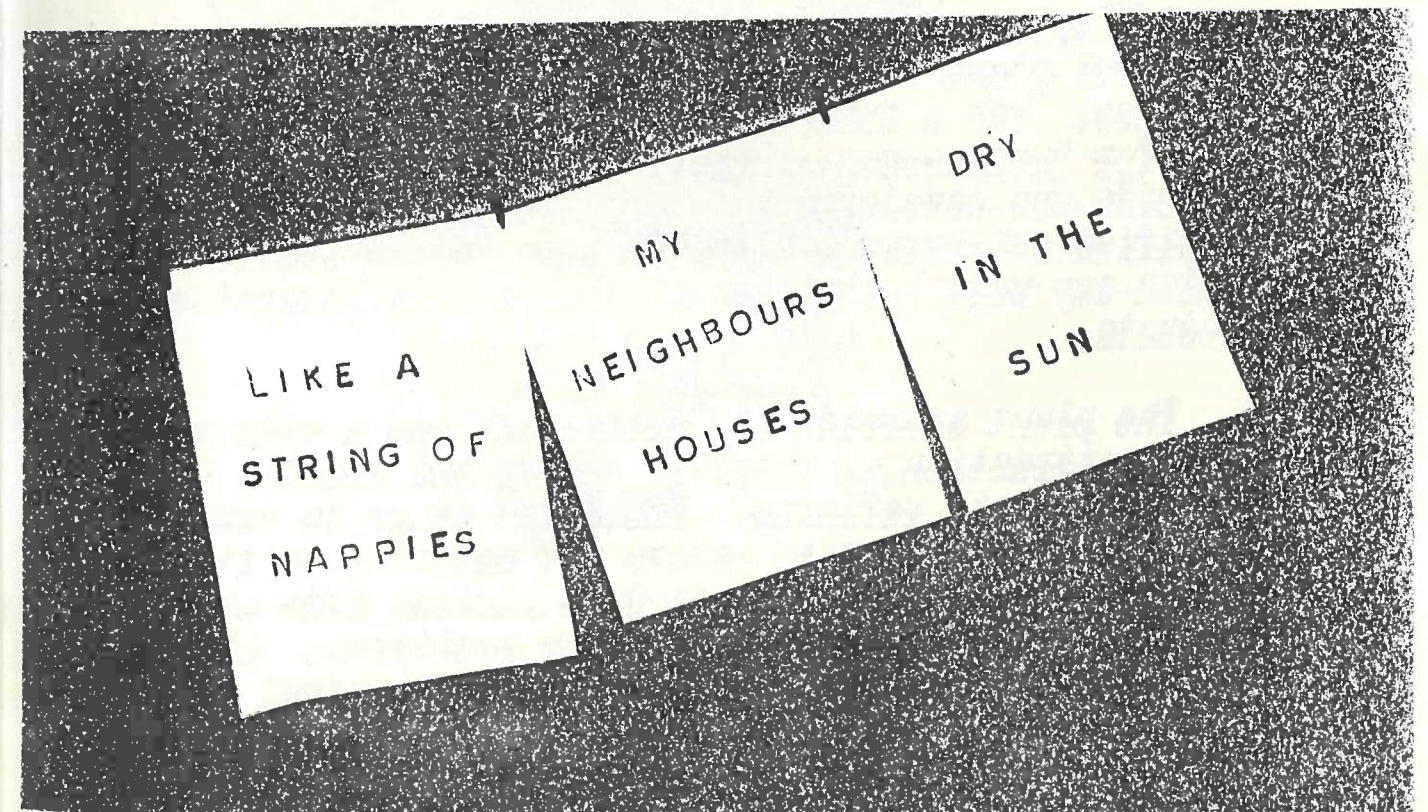
"Yes," she countered, "mothers are very handy for dirty nappies and getting up in the night. I'll expect you back for him in a year or so, will I, when he's no trouble to look after?" He pretended to be hurt at this, and went and told the other children to hurry up. They asked for their Mum, to help them to pack, but he swept their request aside, and went in to the room himself. When he shepherded the children back into the kitchen, she was blocking the back door.

"Jed, Maria, you don't have to go with him, I think you should stay ..." she was trying to sound ordinary, in control.

"Don't take any notice of your mother, she's hysterical." John faced her, threat in his eyes. She stood ground and he grabbed her upper arms. Past his bulk she could see Maria's little face, crushed, bewildered.

"Don't," she began. He shook her and threw her out of the way. As she hit the wall she saw him push the now crying children onto the porch. Then John hesitated, there was somebody else out there. She saw a blue shirt, a middle-aged man who fielded Jed and Maria as if he did it every day. "I've had a complaint," he said, and the small, slightly nautical looking figure behind him coughed nervously.

There may be a time to laugh and time to cry, but sometimes they come at once, and even when she had stopped shaking there was no way of knowing for sure which it had been. She looked up and Rex Anders smiled at her. It was a time of change, that was sure, and not all bad either. The corners of her mouth turned up against a last ebbing sob.



influenza, measles, chicken pox and colds. To combat the
ary to use Vaccines, which make use of the natural defense
the mammalian body. In principle, if a macromolecule (or
is introduced into an animal body, the thymus gland and
react by producing a specific high molecular weight
antibody). these

A LONG WAIT
THIRTY FIVE YEARS
FOR THE FRAGRANCE
OF CABBAGE TREE
FLOWERS IN MY HEAD

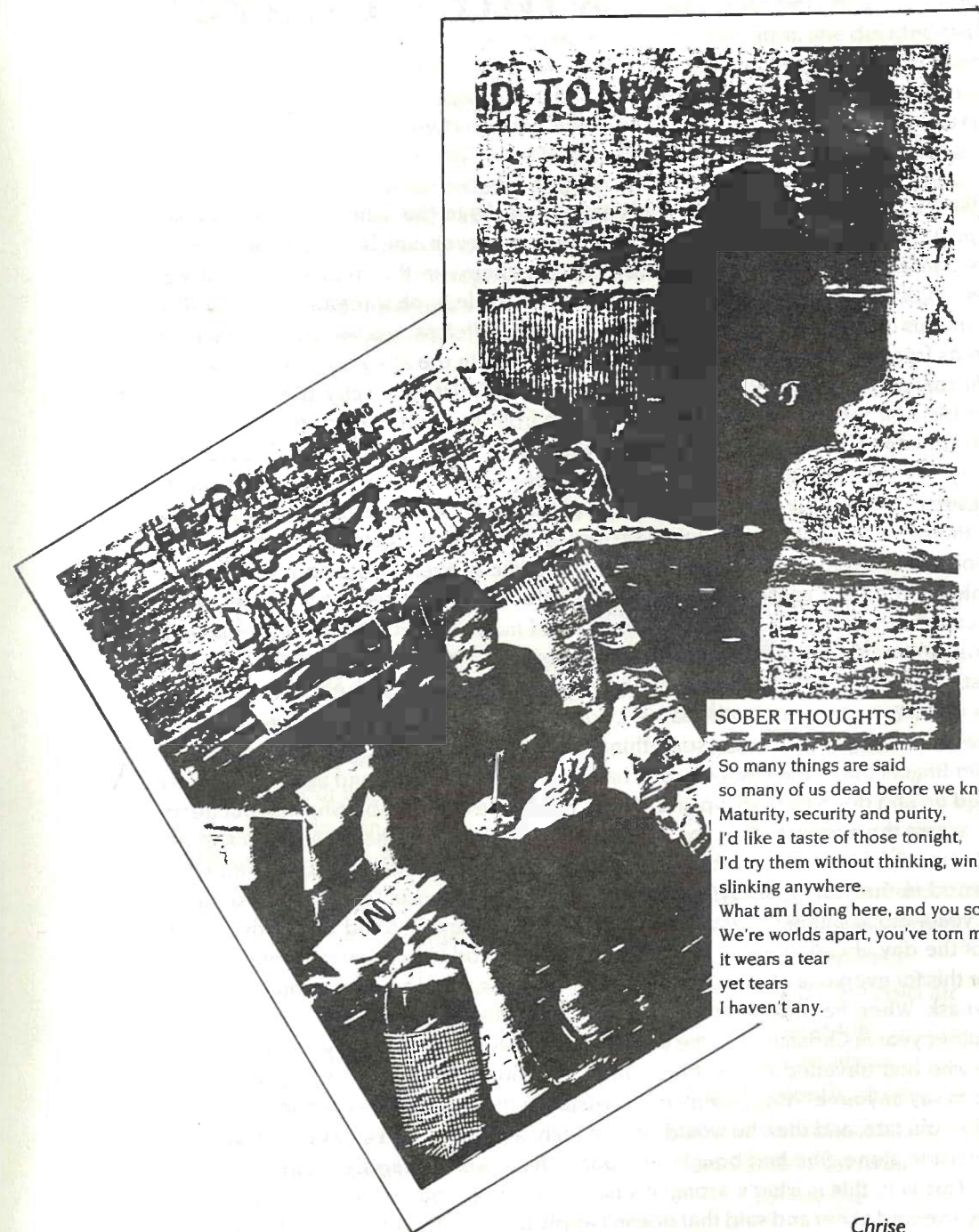
the required dose is only a few microlitres.

Modification of Natural Products.

One valuable use of the specificity of enzymes is to
plentiful plant steroids into structures very similar to
hormones. For a number of years now these modified ster
used for "replacement therapy", and then a major use of
steroids was developed as general anti-inflammatory agents
modified sex-hormone steroids have become available as
which may well become one of the world's largest-scale
products.

The plant steroids are collected from a wide range of
direct extraction of tropical tubers and orchids to waste
sludge from oil refining. The first stage is usually to
unwanted side chains to reduce the material to its basic
It is then necessary to introduce various side chains on
the ring structures at certain key positions. Chemical
unselective and give poor yields and very mixed material
sent in certain micro-organisms are able to do this with
The choice of organism and operating conditions are still
empirical and in general a thick suspension of the organ
the plant steroid is then introduced, either as fine sol
solution, and the whole system incubated for some hours.

Lora



SOBER THOUGHTS

So many things are said
so many of us dead before we know it.
Maturity, security and purity,
I'd like a taste of those tonight,
I'd try them without thinking, winking,
slinking anywhere.
What am I doing here, and you so full of beer.
We're worlds apart, you've torn my heart
it wears a tear
yet tears
I haven't any.

Chrise

Winter Leaves

Julie Sargisson

IT WAS WINTER. The stark branches made jagged cracks in the ashen grey sky. He had gone, almost before she awoke, eager for his day, inspired even. She lay, watching the black branches making patterns, changing meaningless patterns in the freezing wind. It was below zero at this hour, and the rain drops ran along the telegraph wires and dripped off in long pendulous drips, and the cold and the grey and the lifelessness was there to swallow her, wrap its freezing arms around her like the ice-queen in the story and turn her soul to ice. Traffic roared along Ferry Road, the main artery into Christchurch city, the smog would hang and blacken the already ashen day. Coming from the north where the punga and rūriri and cabbage trees stood green all year, she could not believe this dead made-over English city. The planned and successful British colony with its 'better class' of citizens, its gothic facades.... In summer, when she had brought the baby home, feeling older, so much older, as though she had lived through the reality of a medieval nightmare, captive and in pain, a wounded animal.... then, then it had seemed like heaven. There had been blood-red peonies in the front garden and bushes of lilac by the back sheds and the tall green poplars, elderberries and black currants, and he had made her a Christmas tree. She had cried because it was so beautiful and she had escaped the hospital and could walk again and was still alive.... and this strange perfect creature had been given to her. But even then she knew nothing would ever be the same.... not ever.

That was months ago. Almost like something she had read in a book. Her nose was freezing and her fingers out of the blankets. She had been up at midnight and again at four and had walked up and down the hall, up and down, to calm the crying baby. She had put her in the room across the narrow hall so she would not lie and listen to the breathing, carefully listening — watchful in case something happened.... And now, in that room sometimes, the baby pointed to the corner, always the same corner and wailed in fear. The house was a hundred years old, a miner's cottage, tiny cramped and dark; it could be anything. She thought of the day ahead. It was a long grey tunnel; the nothingness of it frightened her. Was it like this for everyone? What did mothers do? She was afraid to ask. Not that there was anyone to ask. When her friends did come, not really friends but people she knew a bit from her other year in Christchurch, she was ashamed, ashamed of her grey life and felt like someone who had travelled to another country and forgotten her native language. What was there to say anymore? Way way off in the distance there was Geoff coming home from art school — but late, and then he would work at night and she would sit with the baby and watch television alone. She had bought that book, that book by Germaine Greer, and devoured it. This is it, this is what's wrong, it's not me it's not.... but when she talked to him about it he sneered at her and said that doesn't apply to you. Why not she had thought, why why why not, she had wanted to scream, but there was the house and the baby and no money and no car and the endless grey suburbs, the wastelands of Christchurch. She had forgotten what existed outside of it.

One night she dreamed, dreamed she was standing in the long backyard with others, perhaps it was a party, in the late afternoon when the shadows of the poplars were long on the green lawn. It must have been summer.... Suddenly she felt herself rise in the air and

was at the height of the tops of the poplars looking down and the leaves were going *shshshsh* like water and she awoke, it was raining but she felt elated and happy, just happy believing that one day, not too far away it would be different.

At last emerging from the snug warmth of the bed, she drew herself up like an old woman. This was it, this was how she had ended up. She could see no further. With some satisfaction she dragged a second-hand old man's grey dressing gown around her. It was how she felt. She was 21. Soon the baby would wake. With some resolution she decided that whatever else mothers did that she didn't know about, they always cleaned up. Her own mother had set great store by it. Although, invariably, half way through she realized that in fact she did not care, not only not care but didn't even see the difference between things cleaned up and things not cleaned up. They both had their order. Like trees in a forest or shells scattered along a beach, there was order in disorder. There's one for him, she thought smugly of Geoff who thought her unbelievably untidy and messy and told her so often. Kneeling before the fire-place, the sleeves of the old dressing-gown round her fingers, and her hair hanging long in her face, she swept the ashes from the grate. The ashes and the day were the same colour and inside herself she felt ashen and grey. The Holocaust, she thought grimly of Nostredamous and his prophecies, the Holocaust is here, now.

Sunday beautiful morning
Moehau appears
through the windows
round my bed
riding clouds of white
drifting out of sight
the air feels thin
and moving upwards

Chrise

The casurina needles hang
fine harp strings
against the pale wash
of dawn sky.

Julie

Light filters in through
splintered greens and gossiping cicadas
plays quietly
then leaves to
dance another tune
some other place

Chrise

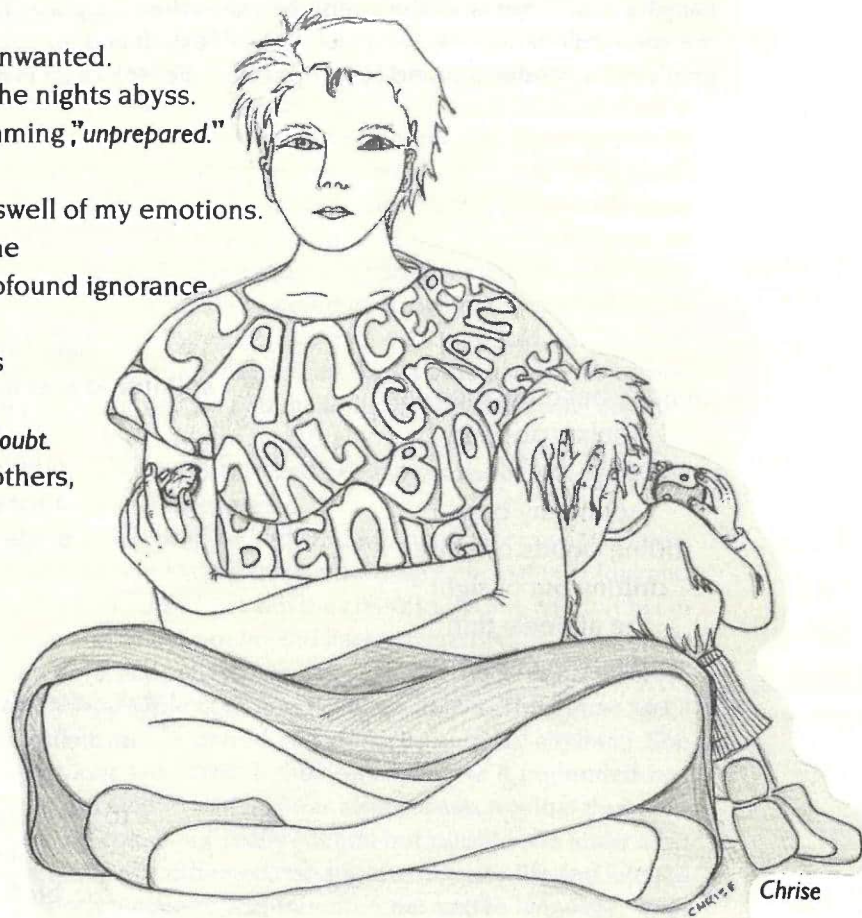
I wake after dreaming of drowning
and climb from this warmth
made of feathers
to be stung by the cold air
of morning
birds are about
and I silently shout
for the beauty of bush
as I gather up brush
for my fire

Chrise

SILENT BELLY

dedicated to those with cancers

The initial ache had come.
Wedged deeply, foreign and unwanted.
Drawn within the darkness of the nights abyss.
Down into its silent belly screaming "unprepared."
Fumbling for my footings.
Tossed and turned within the swell of my emotions.
Fragile layers loose beneath me
breaking with the weight of profound ignorance.
Alone amongst anxiety.
Held captive with the thoughts
that no one else could hear,
for fear of sowing further, seeds of doubt.
Alone amongst the sounds of others,
sentencing my son.



That Summer

Julie Sargisson

"IT'S BEEN YEARS since I've talked like this. It's hard to get close to people when you're older and in another country..." Simone smiled, her big white teeth against her swarthy face. "I remember you" she said "slopping into the classroom in your great big shoes" and she threw back her head and roared with laughter.

And indeed, I remembered her, with her exquisite fine-structured dark face and black hair, sitting silent in the corner, brooding. "She is so quiet," they said in wonder "she never speaks..." Twenty years before in that dingy latin class, I had wondered also. Simone... Simone.

We were walking along the fence-line across a vast field of oats, and in the heat of the high summer sun it whispered and flowed mysteriously around us. Each stalk shook its tiny seeds at the breeze and rustled, and the next and the next for a mile across the paddock. Beyond, the burned pasture rose into big rounded sandhills.

"Father's selling up sheep" Simone said "not enough feed." We had walked miles to the river through the paddock of oats and on towards tall poplars through wild flowering chamomile and dry summer grasses filled with mosquitoes round our ankles. And the silver river with barely a foot of water was overhung with willows and we had lain in their shade...

It was Tony we remembered, as though after all these years we still reeled in disbelief at her young death. And as though in some way she bound us together in mutual love of her; to come together perhaps always, and somehow make her live again. The sun glittered and burned through the green filigree of willow just as it had done that summer long ago. But there had come a silence in both of us; there would be no party tonight, no drunken journey through the deep starlit plains of the Waimate...

Somehow those other journeys through the adult maze had never happened for Tony... perhaps, at 16, all the journeys had become one in those incredible last instances as the lamp-post rushed towards them out from the night. Perhaps then she had known the answers, the tricks to the puzzles that Simone and I worked this way and that, laughing that we had stalked the same ground when so far apart and so long unseen.

And still we were perplexed by the hot yellow sun gleaming from the river as if demanding which was real? Had Tony known then? Was she blessed to be released from the dark pain of discovery? Or was it cruel that she was not here with us to share this womanhood we inherited. Among the hay smelling summer grasses and the wine and the sun glancing off the river, it seemed sad that she was not...

The scenery of our world had changed with Tony's death, as though it suddenly became a hectic race between living and dying and which would get the better of which. But it was only then, as the river chanted softly past us, that I realised Simone, big strong Simone, had seen many more faces of this queer thing called life long before that night. That haunted silence in those first days we met made me realise now, that somehow she had already known womanhood, the horizons of what it could mean were already familiar to her... What had occurred in that cottage on this same farm where she had been a child? Where she had returned every year in summer to her mother, huge-eyed on the drugs of the mental hospi-

tals still after all these years. "Mother" she always called her in the gentle tones of real love. Seeing her here where she had lived before the girls hostel, was understanding the strength she had once drawn, tapped from the land, these hills, drawn into herself to protect her mother...

Simone.

She drew out some fat meat sandwiches.

"Keep us going till tea-time" she said with her witch's laugh. We batted at the big blow flies and ate the sandwiches hungrily. We sat there many more hours among the scented grasses, not talking of Tony any longer or of Simone's mother, but meandering through the many years we had been friends... the long train journeys between Wellington and Auckland, the endless long smoke filled nights, the mardi gras of people and music, friends and lovers and always, at the end of another circle the longing in both of us to leave the grey bondage of the cities and be free. We had rented a cottage by the sea in the early days and sometimes hitched the 40 miles into the University, but mostly not. Somehow it was not a priority anymore... the promises of knowledge had proven empty.

But here, close to the land we both understood from childhood, we knew through it all, we emerged sisters, and the men were there and the children were there but we were somehow the same breed of pine tree with our roots firmly in the same soil.. And the poplars cast long slanting shadows and their leaves went *shshsh* in the late afternoon breeze as if some mysterious shift of consciousness had occurred. We gathered our things and walked back through the oats that rippled and flowed also under the deepening summer sky.

Alice watched them through the window of her kitchen. The big-boned frame of her daughter and the thin child-like figure of her friend. They looked beautiful in the lengthening shadows of that late summer afternoon, laughing and talking, so intent on themselves, so sharing of themselves. She wished the moment captured and go on forever. The climbing rose on the wall outside the kitchen window was blooming. A mass of sweet gardenia scented tiny white roses. Somehow that rose reassured her; it was a wild thing, growing and flowering despite everything. As waves of dishes and dirty clothes, breakfast morning-tea lunch afternoon-tea dinner — a good dinner for working men... rose up and engulfed her, swept over her leaving her exhausted and confused, unable to think, the roses bloomed, simply fulfilling themselves naturally, uncomplicatedly, without question... And Simone and Sera, they were like that, intent upon discovering who they were and then moving in those directions. She admired their freedom, not just their freedom to change their circumstances, but the freedom they seemed to possess within themselves, to learn, to grow, to change and to share with each other the very depths of their experience. The enormous understanding and love that came with it. Go, Simone would say on her arrival, go out of the kitchen and rest in the shade, and she would commandeer the kitchen in a formidable manner that the men would recognise, and respect the task she did as at least equal to their own. Meals would be cooked, morning and afternoon teas served, but Simone would preside with the dignity of one who had done a job... This had escaped her in her own life. In the signing of the marriage contract she had somehow not foreseen that she would serve the way of his life until her understanding of herself was lost among the endless heaps of dirty dishes, dirty clothes until even the desire to search for it left her. Yet she had not been without strength in her youth. She had been a nurse and had been good at it. She had enjoyed working with other women and remembered the sharing between them of the work, the difficulties and the pleasures. Out here there was no sharing. The farmers wives competed with each other — the most elegant house, the well kept garden, the most served and serviced husband and indeed, they themselves — well turned out, expensively dressed possessions. They threw coffee parties to prove it. Once, but once, Alice had run in desperation and knocked on the door of a neighbouring woman. Help me, she cried as the door opened, I cannot stand it any longer, I am going mad, and the woman had

reeled back in disbelief and horror, even fear. Alice had never asked for help like that again. She knew they were afraid of her, embarrassed by her, scared to begin to think what a woman could be whose house was peeling, and unkempt inside, who had no garden, who spent long periods in Ward 8 in Waimate. They feared her. She rose like a spectre in their dreams of what might be beneath the carefully manicured veneer.

Yet there had been things that sustained her. Like the climbing rose, her children had daily delighted her. Yes, there was life, this was life in the innocence of the small faces. Like brown berries they inhabited the trees and the riverbanks, with the sheep and the horses. Daily they fulfilled themselves, living without question and at night slept the soft purifying sleep of the very young. With them had left hope. Each one, one by one had gone off to boarding school, and even though it was only an hour's drive away, the school would not allow the boarders home for weekends... Alone she opened the small bottles of pills the doctors kept giving her, then she moved like a robot... without pain...

It was only now, years later, now that Simone came home for weeks at a time, that hope, like a small uninvited bird caught the corner of her eye, and she almost couldn't bear the flash of its white wing.

"Mother, don't let him rent the house in town," she said "It's your house, bought with your money, use it. Go! Stay there! Catch up with old friends, do the things you have always wanted..." Mother! she seemed to be whispering to her, even at night in her dreams, save yourself, you must... mother...!

By the little window at the back of that dark kitchen, she was sitting as we walked in, the tiny white roses a falling veil behind her dark head. She turned her huge blue eyes on us and they shone deep; timeless eyes, that could have belonged to someone very young or someone very old. Her dark skin and shapeless body sagging and wrinkled fell away from those eyes, yet just then she was astonishingly beautiful. A big roast spat in the oven and flies darted crazily in the heat and aroma of it, landing in old cups of tea, dizzily plummeting into a bowl of white sugar on a long dining table covered with a faded plastic table cloth. Cigarette butts filled a saucer. How long had she sat?

"Did you have a lovely picnic? Simo? Sera?" In her eyes there was a longing for it to have been perfect for us, yet too, deeper than the pleading, stronger than the needing for us to have achieved something she hadn't, a blessing came through her, she blessed us, I know.

Her brown stained fingers shook as she lit a cigarette and smoked, the hand bearing the smoke waiting only inches close to her mouth between the deep inhales. Then she stared before her as if she had forgotten we were there.

"It was after the war. When we got back, we were allotted blocks of land, the ones who wanted to farm applied. A block of land and a subsidy, we got, not much either. When I came here it was scrub, right across to the ravine, down to the river, manuka, bush over the ridge" he spoke slowly considering "we had to clear, that's why we got it, to farm the land... but in those days it was just me here and I'd fish and there were big trout, eels... had a bit of a garden too. Used a slasher... cut for him down the road too, to get enough money. Built this after a few years, but in those days I just camped out, had a tent for a while and then a bit of a hut. Just enough to sleep and a fire outside." He related this without tonal expression or nostalgia. It might have happened to someone else.

"Sometimes I finished cutting at dark, too tired to eat, just fall into bed."

He cut the meat. We were white faces in the electric light, sharp angles, black shadows. Dishing up the big roast dinner, we tried to imagine what had gone before.

"Those were the days, eh Father."

"You, you don't know, Simo," his fondness for her softened his voice...

"Lived here on my own for ten years... It was later on, when I met Alice..." his voice came through mesmerised by the memory, as if recounting a half forgotten dream... "I started building this, it was for her... for us..."

Alice's wide blue eyes clouded over. She felt herself pulled back by his words. That day,

that day of late summer when the clouds had banked up in the heat all day when not long married, they had driven 'home', the home that she barely knew... the place she would make her life. (He had always come to town on her days off to woo her.) The kitchen softened...

"...And they were driving, driving through the star-filled night, turning and winding and the hills rose up and swept down into valleys and they drove on... on. And even then she knew that the planets lined up and destiny was being fulfilled and she moved in to the unquestionable first act of her life which she could only play out, play out till the end. And the road weaved and curved through the hills on and on and inside her she knew already she was pregnant and there was no stopping now, no going back and the clouds were banking up and covering the stars so she could no longer see, she no longer could read the planets and know the meaning of it all. Lost in them she would be the woman in his life... And the lamp-post did not come out from the night as it did for that child Tony and life did not stop there and they drove on and on unrelentingly on...

And then, there they were. The tiny half built cottage. They ran from the car to the cottage in the spitting rain and as they leapt through the door, it poured... the black sky opened up and they stood by the door staring out into the teeming night at the pouring rain and the drips came through places where the tin wasn't nailed down and down inside the unfinished walls and they stared into each others eyes and began to laugh, to laugh and laugh helplessly. And he put his arms around her and said he admired her freedom and that it was all for her..."

"Father!" Simone said "It was your dream, the farm, it was yours, not hers, it was yours..."

"I did it for all of you. I worked here to make a good life for us all" but his voice was soft because he loved Simone, and weary as though even he did not know anymore.

"Father! You can't rent mother's house in Waimate, she needs it." They faced each other from either end of the table, father and daughter, he a huge man with heavy features and dark skin, stooped over by the years of heavy physical labour, she the finer image. Involuntarily, he rose filling the stark kitchen.

"Simo, this is your mother's home... I built it for her... we need the money from the house for the farm. It is an investment. Her life is here. Everything I have done is for her, the family, for you. The house is with a Land Agent. It will be rented. That is my final word."

Alice stared at him from her chair opposite me at the table, Simone said softly "Mother, you have to tell him, tell him, mother..." Slowly, and with the greatest effort, physical struggle almost, to surface part of herself, searching first my face and then that of Simone... she spoke slowly and deliberately...

"In coming here to be your wife, I left a part of myself... I did not know that that part mattered until long after it had gone... This has always been your farm, Joe, even though, in my own way I have loved the land myself. Now I am old and perhaps it is too late but my Aunt left me that money for myself and I am going to keep the house and go and stay there alone. A place of my own to find what I have lost. You cannot take the house from me and the farm will go on as always. Joe, Joe, please..."

Her strength gone she sagged, her head in her hands, shaking. Simone quickly put her arm around her hugging her.

Joe stared at her, just stared, as if seeing a stranger, a foreigner whom he would never ever be able to understand, then turning, leaving his meal untouched, he left the kitchen.

Much later, Simone and I wandered across the cool grass in the moonlight. We climbed a hill overlooking the weatherboard cottage with the woolshed out the back. The dogs chained to their kennels were alert and restless. Massive ragged black pine trees cast monster shadows in the strange light. It had the unreal quality of a stage set. The land, a force unknown, swept down towards the river and up to form hills... the moon a ball of phosphorescent light, a million miles away... we sat on the hillside in silence.

FERN FLAT BLUES

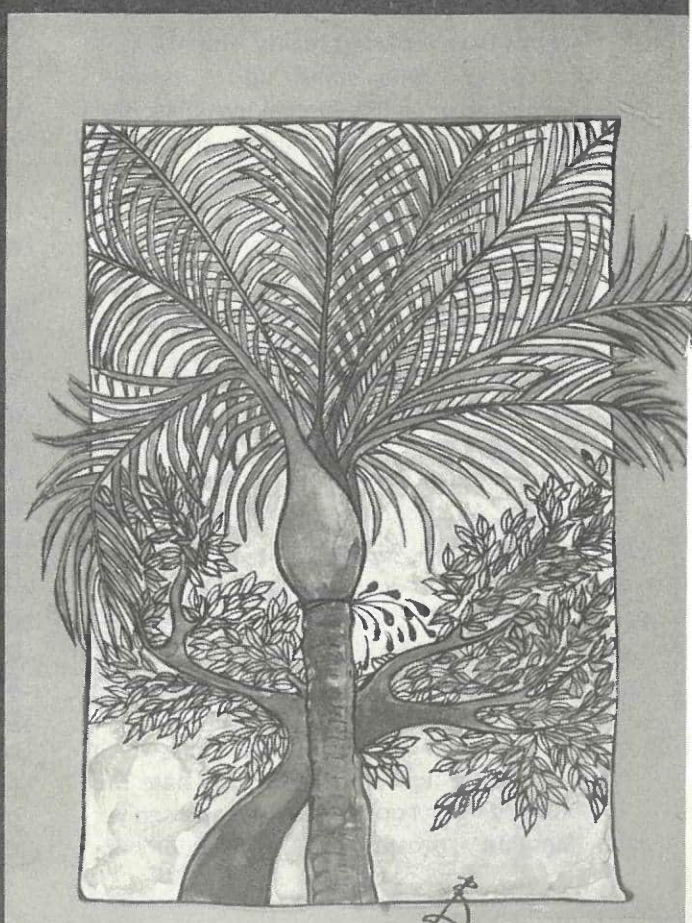
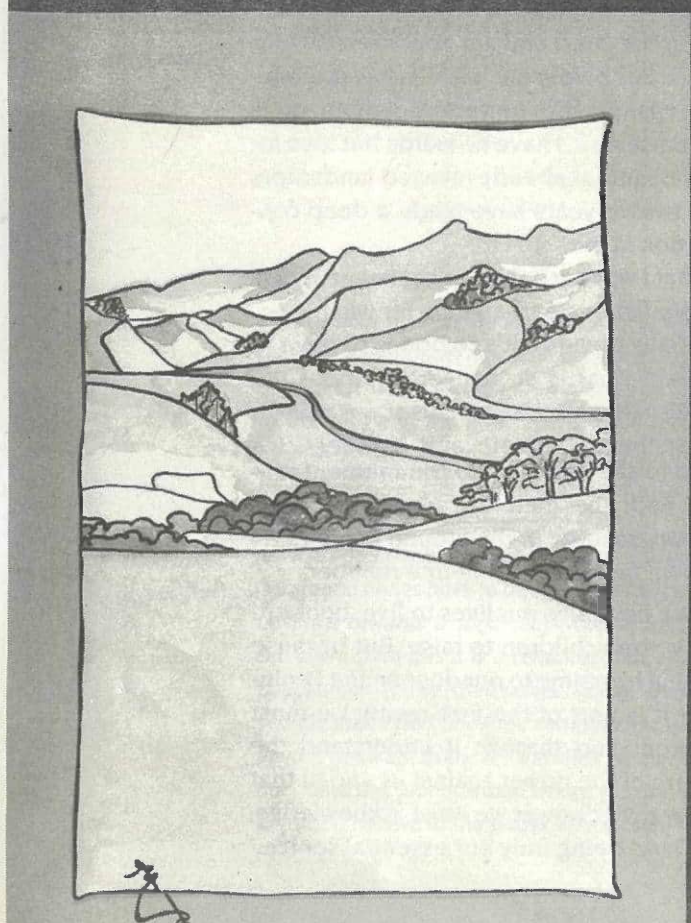
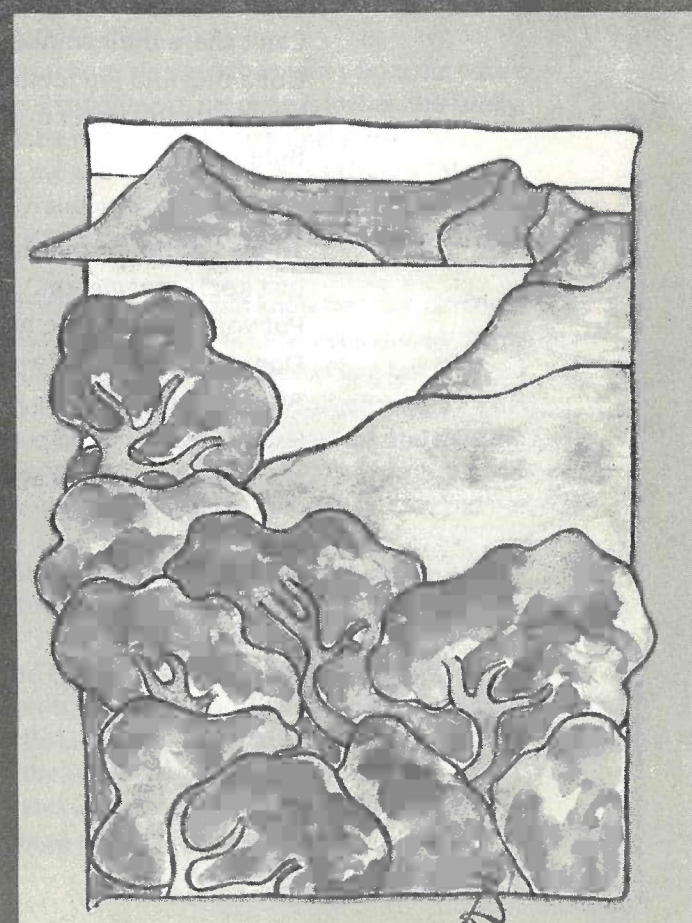
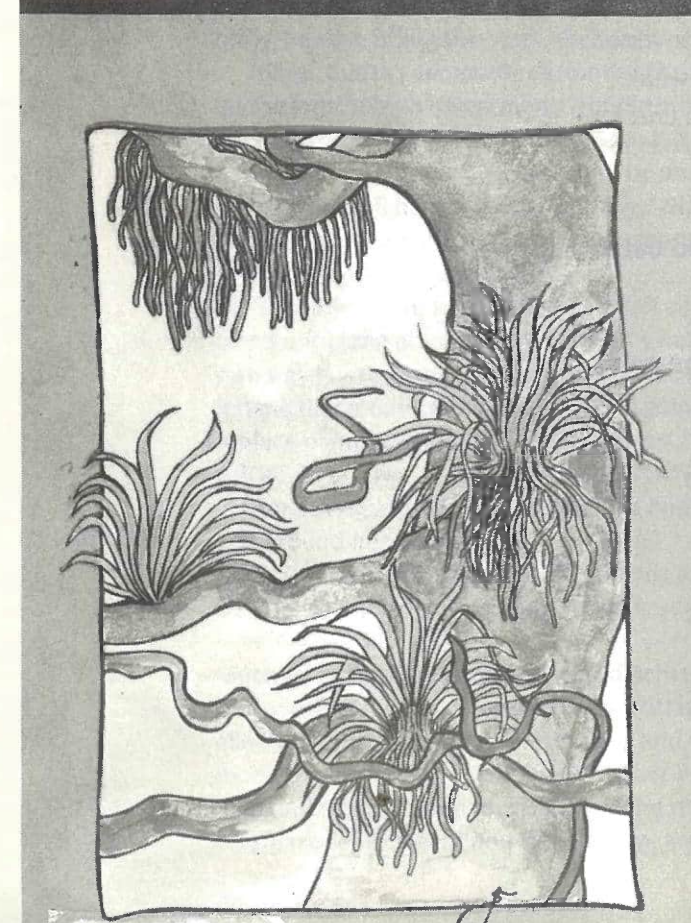
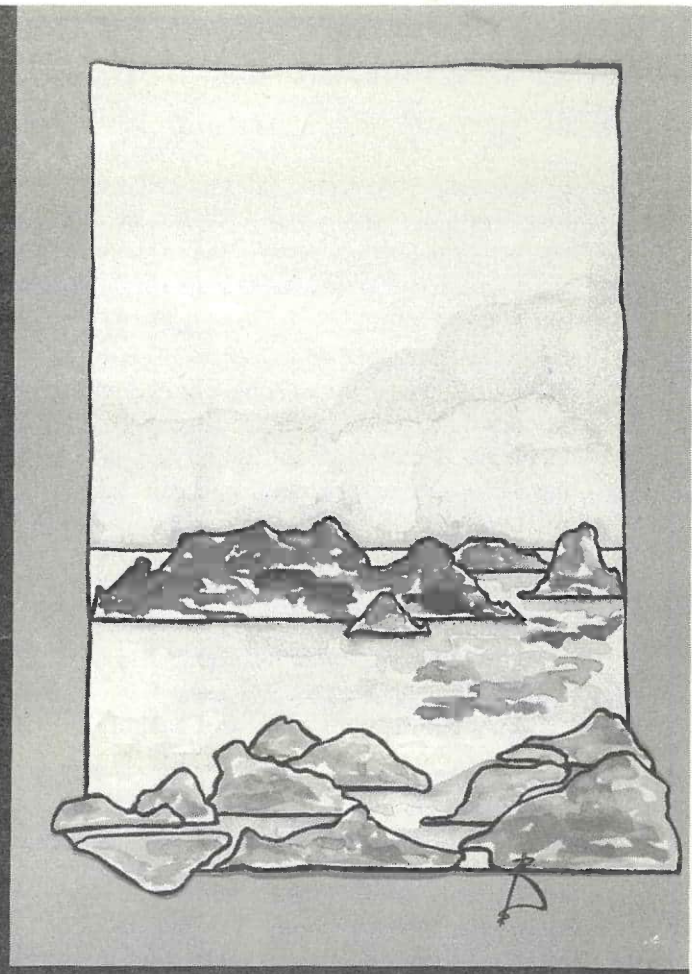
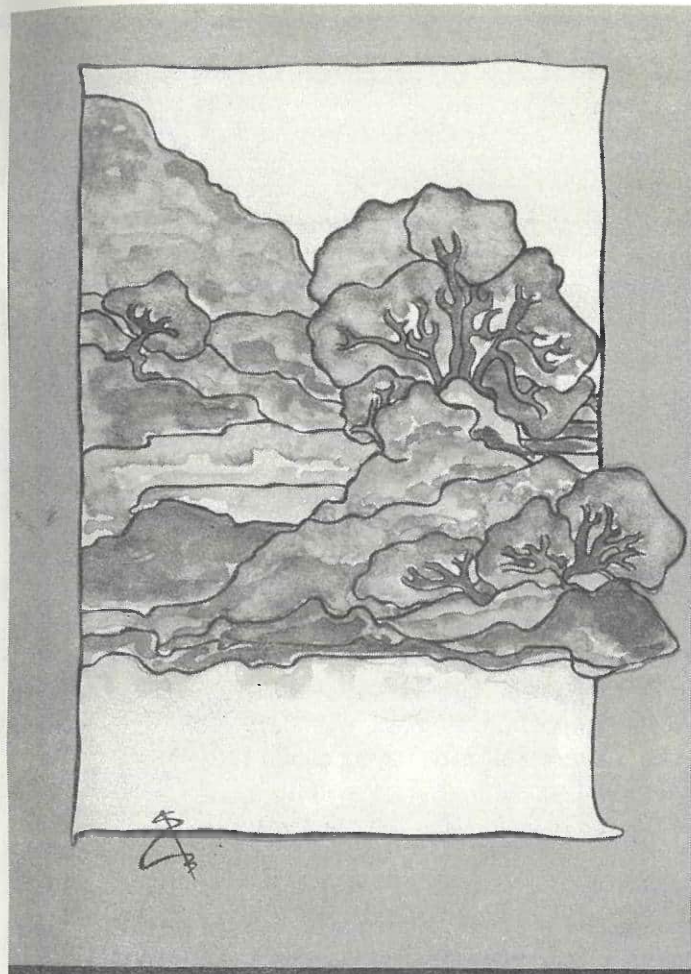
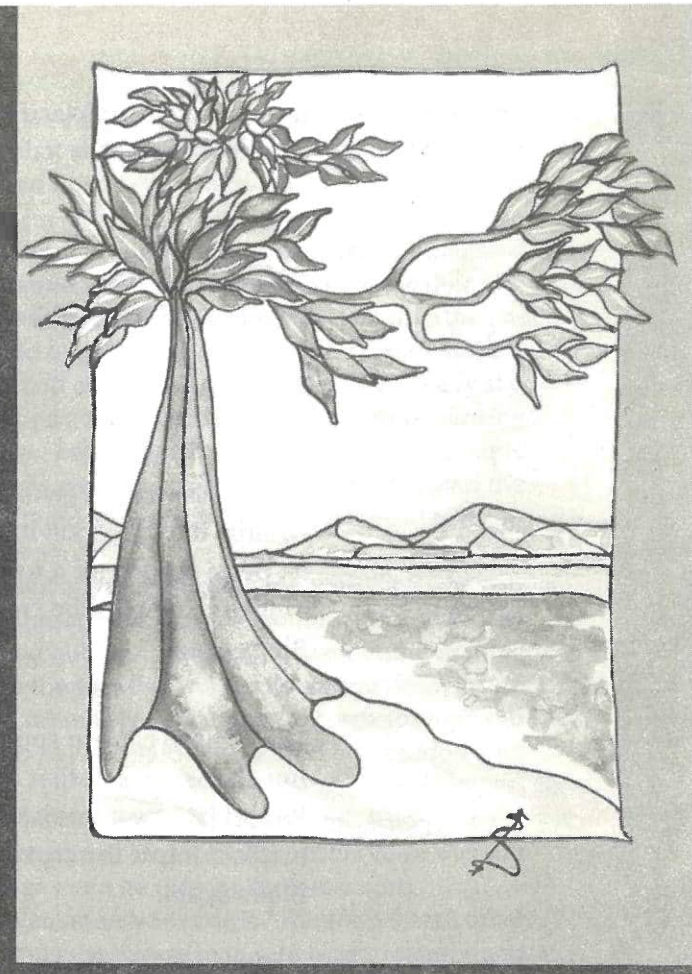
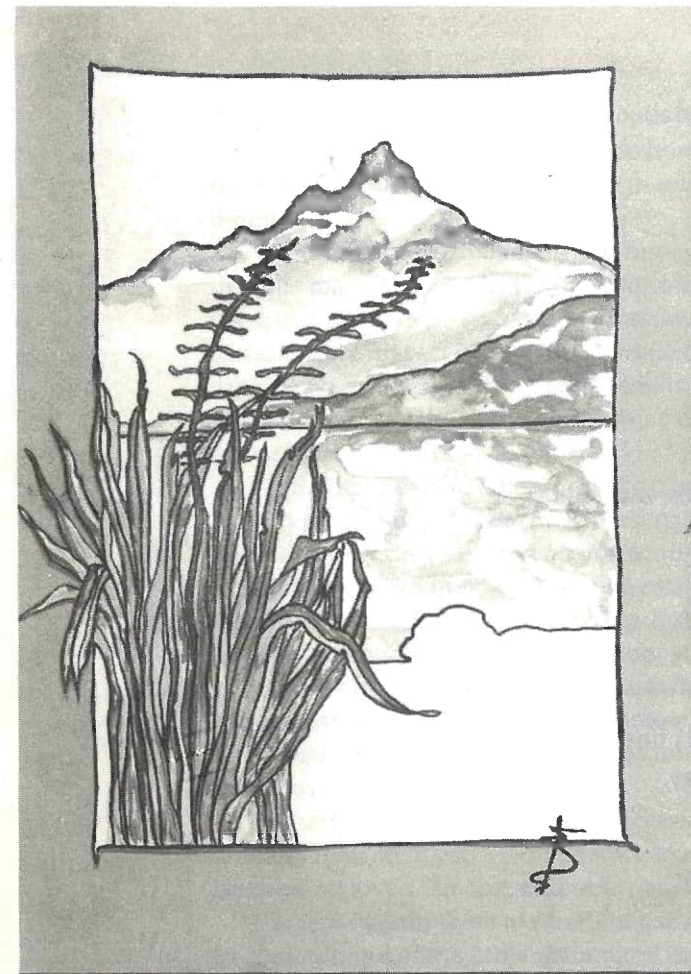
The poplar tree is giving me the fingers
Against the monsoon hills.
Its been raining for a week
Think I'll jump in the creek
Blues again.

The right to choose sounds fine and free
But choosing ain't that easy.
Period late by a week
Just looking at the creek
Blues again.

Can't hug my friends or kiss 'em
Can't share their smokes or wine
Got a bug and I'm feeling weak,
Maybe its the water in the creek,
Blues again.

There's nothing you can do babe
Just keep pluggin' on.
Put your finger in the leak
Don't get washed down the creek
Blues will go
Sad and slow
Doncha know, blues again.

Lora



LIFE VERSUS MINING — *Coromandel*

Catherine Delahunty

I HAVE FIVE YEARS OF USELESS ANGER AND FRUSTRATION WITH STRUGGLING IN A SEEMING VOID. AGAIN AND AGAIN A STRONG PARALLEL RISES UP IN MY MIND THAT HERE IS ANOTHER CYCLE OF HISTORY, ANOTHER TURN OF THE SCREW. When we, the pakeha, came here, we attacked the existing society, proclaiming and enforcing our values, imposing our supposedly superior land use system. We pushed aside the Maori people as we who live on the Coromandel may be pushed aside by the multi-national mining companies. They who have no values save profit have come to negate our lives, a new colonialism.

My anger rises up again and again in courtrooms and meetings, because our voices are not respected, our fears dismissed. When I have attended hearings as part of a group of objectors I have felt as if we are in a game whose rules and language are only told to an elite. This is a largely white middle aged male domain where the charts and maps and legal terms have replaced reality. The reality is of people who stand up to oppose exploitative mainly foreign interests. And then the lawyers and judges trot off to drink good wine and use the semantics of their club. We go home and try to guard our hills with our vigilance and our love.

I read the news and I'm tired, tired of the extraordinary complacency and naivete of a populace that allows so much to be imposed upon itself, no vision of the future, no learning from the past. And yet, and yet I think of all the friends made, on and off the Peninsula, because of this issue. All the long journeys down bad roads, to talk, to organise, and to support each other.

It costs a lot, sometimes too much, so you opt out for a few days or weeks, but you can't for long because the licences press on, hungry over your land, or your friends', or the parks and mountains which should be held in trust for all. I hate the feeling when I open the paper and see yet another prospecting application or

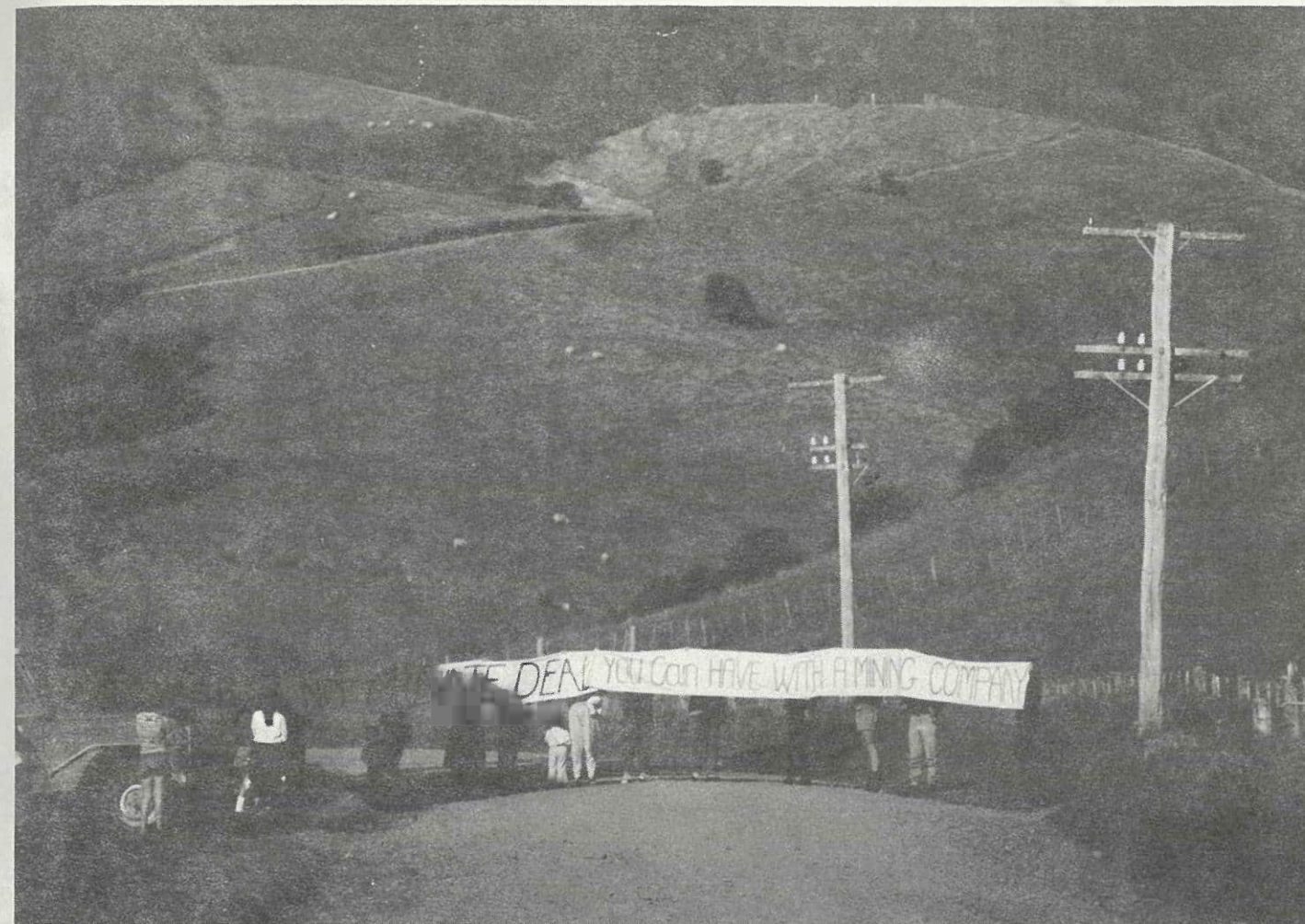
another licence granted. If it's an application we have to make sure that there are legal objections. First to the council and then to the Planning Tribunal. As yet no application on the Peninsula has been refused outright. After all the hearings which are held sixty miles away we are left with the geologists and the drilling rigs and our principles of peaceful direct action.

There's no lack of moral conviction but the toll over time is subtle. Children want to know why their mother has to go to another meeting, or stand all day guarding the boundary fence. I don't know how many more meetings, journeys and wasted hours chasing after geologists. I do know that the opposition are on good salaries, drive rental cars, have helicopters at their disposal and stay in motels all expenses paid. They also have a tame ministry to assist them, the Ministry of Energy.

But we have a fuel, a resource that keeps us going, other than the love and commitment to each other. I drive home along the coast and am nourished by that which lies before me, a silver sea, the shining islands the perfect mountain, it is paradise now. I have no words but love for this beautiful already ravaged landscape, the twelve years have made a deep connection in me.

But I wonder if this is what I want my life to be, fighting and arguing for what is essentially obvious, it's so boring to have to explain what is so dangerous about the multi-nationals plans at this stage, when it all seems so remote and harmless. It's hard to see it ending, so commitment cannot end, the minerals are there in unknown quantity in the ground and greedy human beings are of infinite number.

We have also our lives to live, books to get written children to raise. But because mining has come to our door on the Peninsula it is part of the first reality we must confront and through it understand the nature of the power against us and of that other richer power we must acknowledge, the land being truly our essential source.



Carmen Jaud

We hear now, in the last few days of writing, that the Coromandel has been declared closed to open cast mining, by the government. The feeling of disbelief and the glow opens up in me. The multi-nationals shall not be permitted, for now at least, their open pits and their miles of tailings on this steep, this fragile Peninsula.

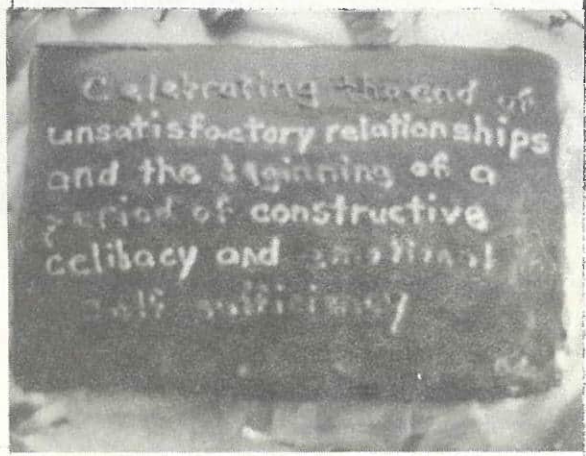
It is not all over, the "small" mines and the underground mines have to be monitored but it is an advance towards a saner definition of land use. But more than this it is a reminder that ordinary people can make themselves heard, their research, their effort and their commitment will not always be swept aside. It's the least we can do for our home this planet, stand where you are, stand together, believe in the power of your own voice.

March 1985 — Now the government's statement floats like a transparent veil between the community and the mining. On February 17th there was a huge flood in our valley which swept away fences, animals and caused slips. Now there is a prospecting application including bulk sampling up our same volatile river. Over at Kuoatunu the prospecting has started despite widespread opposition. There are many forms of mining as destructive as large scale open cast, there are many people who come here for priceless landscapes and clean waters. General political statements offer us no shelter. Once again we live on the front line.

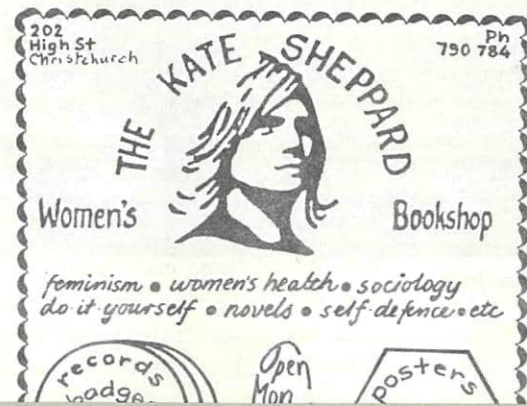
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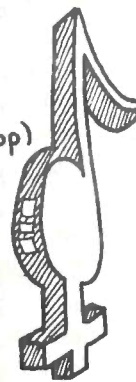
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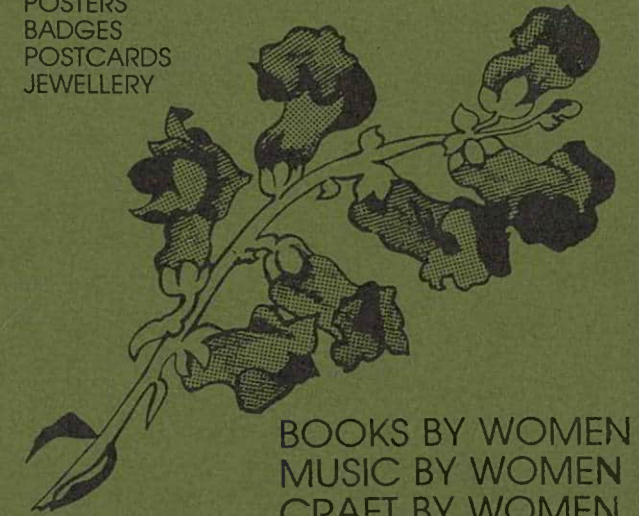
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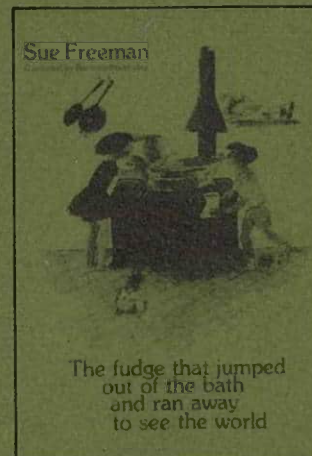
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