Anne KENNEDY Two poems

From *The Darling North*

HELLO KITTY, GOODBYE PICCADILLY

Imagine you'd come to Hawai`iki early.

I don't have Hawai`iki.

Imagine you were in Heaven.

I don't have Heaven.

Imagine you were in Paradise

but at first you don't recognise paradise,

or smell it or touch it,

because you miss earth too much,

and being earthly.

You miss the cold wind and you wish

that instead of leaning into it

reading it with your mouth

and casting it aside like small-talk

on all those occasions of cold wind you had gathered it up

and kept it in a suitcase. Then you could

carry it with you to the new place

open it there

and remember what cold wind feels like.

You say to yourself

if only I had done that

cold wind would come rushing back

but you didn't.

In Paradise it is so hot your teeth

loosen and creak in your gums

and your hands hum.

You notice dainty sandals, gold dresses

shirts accumulating on a lawn

red birds.

You remember a coat, olive green,

rough,

sea-going you wore

near the sea. The beach wall was scooped out by

waves,

and kelp rotted

in your nostrils.

You wore your coat to Mass where the squeak

of new pine pews

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{rang}}$ out into the still air above the people

like modern bells

and you cricked your neck to engage with

the baleful mosaic stare of the Jesus.

There was a department store

where the air sprang with grey wool.

That was where your wore the coat

but can't recall the exact nature

of how you needed it.

Imagine you'd come to Hawai'iki early.

I don't have Hawai`iki.

Imagine you were in Heaven.

I don't have Heaven.

Imagine you were in Paradise

and one day in Paradise

when you haven't been there long

you look up and find streetlights swimming

and people talking at an aquarium

and the jellyfish are purple

and pulse like a heart.

After a day of hard light

dusk falls suddenly

as if the dark were heavy

and the stream that flows close to your apartment

becomes wetter and

shinier

in the moonlight.

You can't help recalling

that you once climbed aboard a bus

perfunctorily, like pecking

an old relative

but you threw it away.

You watch the news

on and off

and the accent of the newsreader bounces

in loping kilohertz

but over time dies down

until you lose it somewhere inside your ear.

You hear

your own accent,

which used to be beyond hearing, a dog's whistle.

Imagine you were in Paradise

and in that Paradise you notice

that the sea is cloudy with sunblock

and rushes up the beach tinkling with the gold rings

of newlyweds,

and the metal detectors of the homeless

are made very happy.

The hills thrust up sharply,

dark, and cars burrow through them

like rabbits. You hear someone say

on the warm air that if you take pork

over the Pali road

your car will break down

and a woman in white will appear

hitch-hiking and you vow

never to do that.

It is your first plan in Paradise

if you can count plans

in the place you didn't plan to go to

which you think you can.

If you look for a book

in a certain section of the Hamilton library

a hand will tap you on the shoulder

and late at night in the carpark

of the Walmart where they disturbed the bones

the bones will pick you clean

if you're not careful. You will be

careful in Paradise.

You notice that some days the air is mauve

and thick and someone tells you, kindly,

about vog from the volcanoes

and it makes you dizzy, the information,

the politeness.

The island, the sea, the waterfalls are pretty.

They close the schools on Fridays

and it is hot. With a pang you remember

the nose of a white cat.

Imagine you were in Paradise but when you arrived you thought it wasn't Paradise.

You remembered crisp air,

cold as a cave. At home you knew someone

who knew someone, a shadow,

and you would say hello.

All day in Paradise you shake hands

with strangers, rabbit ears

on a wall.

You don't know. You don't know.

In Paradise they sound

the emergency siren all over the island

every first of the month, 11.45 a.m. sharp.

You jump out of your skin. It is hot anyway.

You spare a thought for the indentured

plantation workers in their sugarcane cages,

whose great-grandchildren

perform dental surgery at Ala Moana Tower.

There was no shade.

There is no shade.

Rents are high and people say it is the price

of Paradise

and others say there should be an excise

tax so the children can go back to school on

Fridays

although they don't really need school.

In Paradise you don't need anything.

You read in the paper that depressed kids

are turning up at the Help

Program

with the red-haired gene they need help with in Paradise.

For

For instance the word 'bong'

echoes through the university shuttle service,

and the campus is full of stray cats.

There's a certain peacefulness.

Off-ramps with banks of tires,

escape routes for runaway trucks.

You clean the bathroom mirror in Paradise

and on the shelf below it

a pink Post-it says 'Dialects of Seeing'

in the round writing of your opposite.

You don't clean it up.

You know this is like a dream, this found thing,

so ho-hum – no human

endeavour. You didn't make this up. You couldn't

make this stuff up, but you tell it anyway.

Bong bong.

Imagine you'd come to Hawai'iki early.

I don't have Hawai`iki.

Imagine you were in Heaven.

I don't have Heaven.

Imagine you were in Paradise

and on arrival

you remember what you had been told about Paradise

at the little old cold school:

In Paradise you will sit for a long time

looking at everything as if for the first time

and you will understand.

You realise you that you like

the sing-song of

Pidgin,

an exhibition of empty rooms with carved wooden

weeds growing out of the skirting boards,

a variety of friendliness.

Kim chee, mandoo, spicy ahu maki, manapoua buns,

handbags.

(In Paradise you don't need money.

A handbag is pure

luxury.)

You think you see a sign saying Occidental Rugs

but you're mistaken: your eyesight

which you thought would be fixed

in Paradise.

It is dazzling and you are dazzled. The sea.

You walk about. You drive about

learning the avenues of Paradise.

In the Chinese cemetery on the hill

the names of the immigrants

under the colonies of lichen

look out over the bunched handful of city, mini Hong Kong.

You wonder in passing

about your body, its whereabouts.

Eventually in Paradise you discover a shopping mall.

This development is a long time coming

because before you came to Paradise

you bought meat, Brussel sprouts, rough socks.

In the shopping mall goldfish swim in blue ponds

and perfume coils out of stores to engulf

you

and the song composed by the Queen

when she was incarcerated in the Palace

'Aloha 'Oe'

deposits its snippets in the warm air.

You stop at certain shops,

and you learn them, and you like them

for their sound and smell

and their meaning gathers

like clouds which when heavy

fall on to the carpark, and gather again.

And again you process along the upper level of the mall

and warm air bathes your feet

and you incline your head towards price tags

and you fall in love with a cat-face

and stroke a purse in its likeness

to have and to hold.

Imagine you were in Paradise

and in Paradise a funny expression

sometimes pops out of your mouth

and your children laugh because

nobody says that

here. (And here

you need to add that for your children

this is not Paradise because for them

there is only childhood.)

You realise with a jolt that your children's DNA

does not contain the expressions your parents used,

that you use,

and if they took a sample of tissue from your children

they would not be able to prove relationship

through work cut out, mind you,

time being.

On the way to the supermarket you see a film crew

shooting *Lost* out of a white trailer.

By the side of the road you see papery leaves

a layer of chlorophyll.

You try to remember the shape of the hills

that you looked at every day for twenty years,

their greenness, blackness, orangeness

but the only things that come are words

and so you put them down

and they will have to do.

But the hills were always going to go anyway.

And the words.

You try to remember the theme music to the news you watched before Paradise,

the trumpets important like Yeomen,

but it falls through your fingers,

which doesn't matter because it was always

going to become unimportant anyway.

In Paradise you try to remember

a tune your father used to sing while shaving.

I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair,

but it is lost. You find

that in order to remember It's a long way to Tipperary

you need seagulls to be cawing overhead,

bells to be ringing out the Angelus,

your breath to be white on the air

as you run down the passage to your parents'

room.

school uniform bundled in your arms,

you need to be doing up the rubber buttons on your woollen vest while the gas fire snorts.

The song would never have lasted anyway.

In Paradise you walk

down McCarthy Mall

between the acacia trees and their geisha

sprinklers,

and you swing your briefcase because you have a job

in a place and you think

western capitalism meets eastern cat

and discard it immediately

because thoughts are like that and this is Paradise.

Warmth rises through your body

and you realise that

you are cool

and the balconies of apartment blocks downtown

look like box seats for the Pacific Ocean

and for the Sun King, and you want

to wave from one, your fan, your beauty spot

and that the creaky wooden villa with light coming through the floorboards

that you had lived in on earth

has fallen away, and you smile

at the thought of the bright new friends you've made.

The school you went to

topples into the cold gully below it, and magpies rise oodle-ardling until they are full stops

and the extinct varieties of Hawai'i

fill your bookshelves.

A cat you knew once

who slept in your bed on cold nights with its face poking out becomes mythical,

but you were always going to outlive it anyway,

and a cousin on your mother's side falls away

but she was always elusive.

There is no brother

but a digital camera, no aunt

but a pair of shoes,

there are no grandparents but a hair straightener,

but they were always

going. There is no coat,

but you were always going to lose it,

there is no cold wind.

but it was always going to be forgotten anyway

because of the nature of cold and of wind.

When you travel on the bus you are

a little chilly in the air conditioning,

and you listen to the voice announcing each stop

in well-articulated Hawaiian.

You know whose voice it is and you feel like turning

to the old Japanese woman next to you and saying,

I've met that man! You know people.

in Paradise. You remember the voice

from all the previous occasions of going on the bus

of which there are many now because you have been

quite a long time in Paradise,

and the voice is familiar

and comforting,

and when you get off the bus

warmth rises through your body

and it rises through your body and it rises

through your body, and you see

and you feel

that you had to go some time

and that this is Paradise.

FLOOD MONOLOGUE

1.

You never discussed the stream and no doubt the stream didn't want

your discourse (its own merry way) but now that you live by the stream

a mosquito has come up the bank and bitten you, and the stream

is in your bloodstream. You buff the site of entry like a trophy.

Your chuckling new acquaintance takes your cells out to the sea.

2.

It goes all night, you tell your friends drinking wine to warm the house (already warm), and laugh of course like a drain. Later in your roomy

queen you listen to its monologue – ascending plane that never reaches

altitude. Your fingers stretch from coast to coast to try it out,

this solitude, while water thumps through the riverbed.

3.

You're not exactly on your own. Teenagers come and go, the screen-door

clacks, Cardinals mob a little temple hanging in a tree. A neighbour with a bag

of seeds asks you if you mind the birds. There is that film, and the flu, but no. In the mornings earlyish you slide the rippling trees across

(Burnham Wood) and watch six parrots lift like anti-gravity.

4.

At sunset a rant about the dishes – you've worked all day, unlike

some people! The tap runs. The sun, tumbling over Waikiki, shoots through

the trees, gilds the stream (unnecessary), stuns you in the empty room. Every day

for ten years (you realize, standing there) you've crossed the bridge etched Mānoa

Stream, 1972, back and forth, Except the day the river rose.

5.

Some facts: Mongooses (sic) (introduced) pee into the current, plus rats and mice,

The stream is sick. All the streams. Mosquitoes -your messenger and those

that bit the teenagers whose young blood is festive like the Honolulu marathon –

could carry West Nile virus. Often fatal. Probably don't, are probably winging it

like you, and you will go your whole life and only die at the end of it.

6.

The stream doesn't *look* sick. It takes a pretty kink near your apartment.

The trees are lush and spreading like a shade house you once walked in

in a gallery (mixed media). The water masks its illness like a European noble

with the plague – a patina, and ringlets. You're pissed about the health issues

of the stream, and healthcare, because it has your blood, you have its H2O.

7.

You think it's peaceful by the stream? Ducks rage, waking you at 2am,

or thereabouts. Mongooses hunt the duck eggs, says your son. Ah, you say.

That night the quacks are noisy, but you fret in peace. Sometimes homeless

people sleep down by the river bank. Harmless. One time one guy had a knife.

They still talk about it and you see him ghostly like an app against the trees.

8.

All your things are near the stream, beds, plates, lamps – you're camping

apart from walls and taps and electricity. Your laptop angles like a spade,

and clods of English warm the room (already warm). They warm your heart.

Overall you have much less, because of course – divided up. But you're lucky

or would be if the stream was squeaky clean, and talked to you.

9.

The stream had caused a little trouble in the past, i.e., the flood. Not it's fault.

900, 000 people pave a lot, they plumb a lot. Then rain like weights. From a safe

distance (your old apt) you watched your little water course inflate and thunder

down the valley taking cars, chairs, trees. You saw a mother and her baby rescued

from a van – a swimming coach, with ropes – the van then bumbled out to sea.

10.

One apartment in your complex took in water in the flood. And mud. It was

this apartment. You've known it all along, of course, because you watched.

They fixed it up. Lifted carpets, blasted fans for a week. Repainted.

It's pretty good. The odd door needs a shoulder still. In certain lights

though, on the wall, a watermark, the stream's dappled monogram.

11.

You're talking clichés – water under the bridge, love letter from a lawyer,

serious harm, sunk without you. The stream has been into your bedroom,

and you in its. Remember reeds, coolness, summer afternoons. You loved

the stream. Its stinging waters send a last message in lemon juice:

If I'm fucked, you're coming with me. sincerely, the stream.