

# Hinemoana Baker

## Writing Sample

### Last Born

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

## **Liver**

I hang out the washing  
at night.

Each peg squeaks  
into place.

You, in the kitchen light,  
warming my back.

I'm worrying again  
about your liver

as if it helps.  
I feel around

on you— which side  
is it? How big?

You have nightmares  
and kick me in your sleep.

Sometimes  
I kick you back.

## **What the Destination Has to Offer**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\*

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

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

and the cyanide, the no-reason.  
Our dishes smell of flyspray

I wash them while the flies circle

the same flies that have flown  
the rooms of this house  
in formation for weeks

two zizzing pairs.  
Or perhaps they are  
different flies every day

replenishing themselves  
away from my gaze  
middle-aged state servants

in a timeshare, bored  
with what the destination has to offer  
the hydroslide

the boardwalk  
through the mangroves  
bitching at each other

they can't settle  
they should have gone  
to Sāmoa instead.

## **The Fossils**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We are a branch  
say the fossils  
of your family.

## **To my Mother's Surgeon**

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

events, a bombardment. I was wearing  
brown brushed satin, my eardrum  
a hammer and anvil, you were

taking them from behind, catching  
the smallest bones: the ossicles  
the tympanic line of my jawbone, the flick

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **The Airshow**

the airshow

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

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

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

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

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

I rolled my face into my clippings  
pillow and prayed to die before I waked.

My mother wore a dark blue outfit with a light blue chiffon scarf.  
In two weeks we're leaving, Dad's staying here.  
It was the year I learned about diphthongs.  
The year the camping table locked at the knees.

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

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



## Talk

make any sound  
hiss or bubble  
like brick in the hearth

like it was a habit  
tell them all about  
the mountain

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

to the stone  
once for humans  
twice for dogs

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

to sleep in  
using your hands  
and no recitations

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

a stream disappears  
underground  
then hatches

from the trunks of trees  
the yellow quivers  
of the kōwhai

**Whenua\***

(for Ariki Noel Riley, born 21/09/2003)

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

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

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

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

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

\*whenua – land, earth, placenta