

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

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 you wore the coat
 but can't recall the exact nature
 of how you needed it.
 Imagine you'd come to Hawai'i early.
 I don't have Hawai'i.
 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,

and others say there should be an excise
 of Paradise
 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 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,*

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.

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