

## MY MOTHER'S BRISBANE



*Kevin Hart*

My mother's Brisbane was a mess of frangipani and flame tree  
Seen from the windscreen of her car  
Travelling through suburbs whose names she could not say

It was odd nights that fell without the benefit of evening  
While working on dresses for weekends she wouldn't see  
And it was hours with nothing much to do

It was a city remembered from old migrant books  
Something about eleven hills and thunderstorms  
Something about the William Taylor Bridge

It was the *Tele* and Ekka; it was thongs and togs;  
It was a child with a heavy port  
It was a monthly visit to the Queen Street Mall

Something to do with Tracey Wickham I remember now  
And something to do with Kingsford-Smith  
And Lady Ciletno had a place as well

Boris the Black Knight was someone she had to live with  
Though Wickery-Wak she didn't  
And Pancake Manor she never saw or Bunya Park

But the humidity she felt  
While bent over that Singer on a summer's day  
Or puffing through a family afternoon at Fig Tree Pocket

And the westerlies she came to feel as well  
As though she let the city enter her a little more each year  
Until she gossiped about the ghost at Stanley Street

And once she saw a bearded dragon half asleep  
Beside the pawpaw tree in our back yard  
And grabbed a rolling pin and chased it down the drain

# THE TRANSLATION



*Tracy Ryan*

*for Françoise Hàn*

I  
Barbarous—  
they don't make them  
like this  
where I come from

mute & resistant as  
locked concertinas

tricky as origami.

Why so nervous?  
Hymeneal comparisons  
are obvious  
but odious.

I try with scissors  
then kitchen knife—  
too coarse

like skinning potatoes  
with a dulled blade

how to get in there  
without risking substance?

All right, I tell myself, I'll  
only cut the ones I really need  
to read

but a little success  
makes me ruthless  
soon I am plundering

whole sections  
filleting blanks & endpapers

slicing them off like bandages  
after cataracts  
until at last the text  
is open.

2

Are you sure you want to  
go through with this?

Close as marriage but perhaps  
without the benefits

sharing your word-house with  
a stranger who keeps moving

the furniture, or worse  
rips up floorboards to feed

the fireplace.

3

Chess-by-numbers where it's always  
my turn, & I must second-guess  
your every move.

4

I hedge along pages  
like someone dipping  
a toe at the pool's edge  
or is it an ocean?

Better to plunge in  
& be done with  
notions of safety,  
autonomy, I am already

in up to my neck  
& staying afloat  
is the same act  
whatever the depth.

5

*Traduire, c'est trahir*

but the pun gives up its rhyme in  
my language. At school they told us  
*poetry doesn't translate*  
in the same way  
we'd learnt you couldn't  
take large numbers from small ones—  
only part of the picture. If they'd admitted  
*nothing translates &* therefore  
*everything does*, we might have  
lost faith altogether.  
Or stayed there, bipartisan,  
in the between-zone, trusting entirely  
the point of zero.

6

Only the capacity to love  
otherness  
can bring us there  
finally

always the temptation  
to present  
my version  
or fawn  
to yours

an act of balance  
a lens  
less than perfect but  
accommodating  
loving the way the eye  
loves light  
but may also be  
destroyed by it

keeping open.