

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 Wickety-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.