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SQUARE-DANCE THEME 1 & 2

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SQUARE-DANCE THEME 1 & 2

Abstract
You, Clara Eliza, five-foot legendary grandmother, battling wood fires in a freezing dawn
Lauris Edmond

SQUARE-DANCE THEME 1

I

You, Clara Eliza, five-foot legendary grandmother,
battling wood fires in a freezing dawn,

riding to town with an empty purse, the old man
blank with booze – I can see you, moving about

in the dim grey weather where history lodges;
it whirls like fog over the Poukawa farm –

now it clears, and you’re there in the gig reining
in a bolting horse, three terrified children

gripping your skirt ... I think I have always
known you, from tales that had their first telling

three years before I was born, when consumption
at last devoured you. August little lady, you used

every second of your dense half century creating
a clan, taking for materials your doggedness,

imagination, love. It’s time, you know, that we met
more exactly – if a generation’s fifteen years,

four lie already between us. I step forward,
take your small calloused hand; the skin’s weathered,

quite dark, but your brown eyes are sharp and –
no one had told me this – glinting with laughter.
II

You, sudden tall woman looming up through the drift of the years, shaking my sleep; yes,

they do matter, the stories, bolting horses, children learning to read by candlelight ... yet

I'm surprised you know them. It's true then, the unnoticed accumulations of days in the end

built a community, a tribe, connected still by blood, shared knowledge; and you are the grand-daughter

I never saw, come to me out of the inscrutable future. What shall I tell you? Of Aunt Rose,

writing from London, 1882, 'Why, Clara, you are blest, you are highly honoured, being a housewife’

– and truly it was a high calling, the endurance, the shaping patience; let none misrepresent

its homely splendour. But I see you know this already; perhaps it is my gift to you, and has

seeped, safe and strong, down through the crowded years. And yours? Words, the winds that blow back

the years' inertia. We give then, and receive.
My blessing on you, on your children, and theirs.
SQUARE-DANCE THEME 2

I

Now I turn to the clearer quotidian weather of morning and evening; no ambiguous mist here but streets, houses, a room festooned with the treasures of 13-year-old occupation –

RUTH in extravagant colours, photos, plants, books, and you at the centre, dark-eyed girl, first grandchild, with the velvet bloom skin and already humorous smile. How can I tell you of long-dead Clara, how show you the silent peak of the mind on which I stand, looking back a whole century to her, forward to you, sweetly alive here, carrying like a lively germ the secrets of future time – including, I believe, outrageous machines humming away in houses of magic where you will easily come and go. But to family matters; that small long-skirted woman used all her wisdom, her staunchness, to nourish her children; you too, daughter of many daughters, latest inheritor, will likely give birth to a girl who in turn will depart for a later, stranger time.

II

We pick up and carry this baggage, each for a spell conceiving our labour as mothers with passion, and a fine and healing delight; we grow larger of heart as we learn to allow our pain. And each of us plucks from the present, as a new fruit, a variant, is added to earlier strains.
I cannot know yours, though I guess that
the brilliant brushwork in this child's scrap-book
will one day declare you the artist, the woman.
Grandmamma Clara wrenched from her back country
farm skill with horses and with medicines found
in the bush; but you will mature among women
with a larger pride in their powers; take what
we offer, the learnt habits, the faith; respect them,
and alter them. Hers was a raw land, yours knows
itself older and darker; like us you will make
new garments of old and durable threads. Take my hand
now, as I took and held hers, feel the current,
the tingle of courage she passes through me to you.
Keep it and use it, through unimaginable beginnings.

Kirsten Holst Petersen

TRAVELLING: AUSTRALIAN STYLES
For Anna and Mark

As we drove into London
she relived the excitement, thirty years ago
of her first visit,
the magic of names come true,
Piccadilly and London Bridge,
the real thing and her there
with photos to prove it.