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TRAVELLING: AUSTRALIAN STYLES For Anna and Mark

Kirsten Holst Peteresen

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TRAVELLING: AUSTRALIAN STYLES For Anna and Mark

Abstract

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.

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.

He shifted his cramped legs
in the too small car
and decided on 'yeah' and 'really'
as the appropriate answers
to undue enthusiasm.
I held my breath in the back of the car.

We entered the city,
swarming with bowler hats and umbrellas.
'Lousy weather' he observed.
She pointed out the Bank of England,
heavy grey stone, guarding the nerve centre
of an empire —
He admired the flower display
in the window boxes.

The river and bridges
gratefully accepted their
'really'.
Big Ben, unfortunately,
was covered in scaffolding,
and Buckingham Palace
occasioned a story
about Princess Margaret
wearing high-heeled shoes
on Bondi Beach,

but Kew Gardens
in a riot of spring blossom
seemed to please
despite the steady drizzle,
and the hot house, of course,
almost like home.