

**Ko ia Taku Tupuna, Ko ia Taku Tamahine
by Kaiya Waerea**



E hine,
koe tautangata te waka.
koe tautangata te maunga,
koe tautangata te awa,
koe tautangata te iwi.

Ko ia taku tupuna,
Ko ia taku tamahine.

She

wears a pounamu bigger than the size of her fist around her neck. It takes the form of Hineteiwaiwa, atua of birth, it takes the form of Tiki. Clenched jaw, bare feet, standing on the sacred ground of her ancestry.

She

is before the opaque layering of meaning. When childish hands could waver as she sung waiata without hesitation. Bare feet gently lifting and landing to create a beat. Looking openly and with curiosity at the patterned and carved bodies that make a house which tell a story– asking what they mean without blinking.

She

is the last time I could be Māori easily.

~

Ko Tākitiku te waka,
Ko Moumou Kai te maunga,
Ko Nuhaka te awa,
Ko Ngati Kahungunu te iwi.

Ko ia taku tupuna,
Ko ia taku tamahine.

She

is doing the mahi. One morning, after another late night having imaginary conversations in a language she can't speak, she types Ngati Kahungunu into google, weary of auto correction. She finds facebook groups and a website, but doesn't sign up to them, too embarrassed of how little she would be able to bring. She reads about Rongomaiwahine, Kahungunu's infamous lover, and tries to figure out by searching the location of her river and mountain on google maps if she might actually be Ngati Rongomaiwahine instead, but it doesn't look likely. She tries to at least find an image of her, some kind of representation, but only finds a glimpse of a painting in the middle of a film documenting an exhibition about Ngati Kahungunu on youtube. Still, she thinks of the pixelated image of Rongomaiwahine often, her moko, her eyes set off in the distance.

She

is the residue of salt on your hands, the thing that gives taste to everything.

She

sends an email to the Turnbull Library. *Hello, my name is Kaiya Waerea, Ngati Kahungunu but living in London and researching my Whakapapa. I was wondering if you hold the diaries of Maata Mahupuku, and if so, if you might be able to digitise them for me?*

Known for being Katherine Mansfield's lover, Maata was apparently a prolific diarist. She spent time with Mansfield both while at school in Wellington, and for a short while in London, their relationship noted in the Barbican's exhibition Modern Lovers, which displayed Mansfield's original journals reading "*I want her – terribly – as I have had her.*" The Turnbull don't reply, and she wonders if she should have sent her message from an institutional email.

She

is sent by Tangaroa to haunt me. At night I am kept awake by fantasies of flinging my body loose into the Pacific. She is the kind of cold that makes you forget where your body finishes. She is flooding my orifices, bile and bacteria and an incomprehensible blue–red. She is thundering and massive and wrapping herself around the planet.

She

looks up Te Reo classes in her time zone. She finds only one, an online beginners course with a waiting list which costs six hundred pounds. Six hundred pounds! And she thinks of her grandfather having this language beaten out of him, and of what has been lost, and of all the ways it costs to take it back, and when she was 13 he told her to call him Koro but she didn't and now she wishes she had, and she wonders if she should text him.

She

is looking at you for a reason. Eyes straight down the barrel, this look could cause an earthquake. Don't look away, don't take cover, all these years you left her fixed in time, if you don't answer her now there will be a reckoning. She is gathering her self up, is stronger than you now and you know it, the wisdom of generations folded into a child's naivety is what creates a god and she is Atua Wahine.

~

She

reads somewhere that Te Reo Māori isn't something you let in, it's something you let out, you just have to find it.

She

dreams that she is in a car over the Wairarapa. Her father is driving and his silhouette in the front seat is speaking to her but can't seem to form full sentences. He says mana. he says whakapapa. She fidgets in her seat. The rolling bush out the window falls away sharply at the edge of the road, as the car makes its way steadily up the sharply winding mountain. The anguish in his voice heightens. He says maramatanga.

When she wakes she think that if she had opened the door and jumped she could have fallen into Papatūānuku, as green as when she last saw her, and the curling furls of Tāne would have caught her or perhaps she would shatter and return to clay like the first Tangata Whenua,

round bellied and breathing deeply.

Tukua te wairua kia rere ki ngā taumata
Hai ārahi i ā tātou mahi
Me tā tātou whai i ngā tikanga a rātou mā
Kia mau kia ita
Kia kore ai e ngaro
Kia pupuri
Kia whakamaua
Kia tina! TINA! Hui e! TĀIKI E!