

ACROSS THE COURTYARD

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This poem is a tribute – a tohu aroha – to one teacher’s visioning of the future as she stands, waiting for the speeches to start, before the meeting house, Te Ao Hurihuri, on Te Kohingamarama marae (courtyard) at the University of Waikato. Her thoughts, jostling for birth in the dark, agitated territory between public expectations and private anxieties, float away to other courtyards, like the Tainui Bridge at Rāhui Pōkeka (Huntly), and beyond.

Number One leans forward on the bench, eyebrows raised,
peering left along his line, checking their readiness, their hold-our-end-up.
But New Net, pony-tailed and tense, does not connect;
instead, he is squinting across his new-found fishing ground,
gauging the runnels where his eel-slippery, well-schooled words will flow.
Nor Enigma Man, clenched and wary, who leans back to confirm his strategy,
his shaded eyes giving no hint of what-ifs and writhing, fin-sharp possibilities.
And nor Old Taupiri, inward-eyed and angle-sticked, pummelled
but unyielding like the Monte Cassino of his shattering glory day,
enduring his hip, down at the end of the line.

She stands across the courtyard — not at the back, with the whitebait children,
the don’t-look-at-me, the hot hands just popped out for a minute —
but apart, beside the second row...

Passive, prow-like, she slowly swings, current-tugged, into a private courtyard:
Blu-tak and felt pens; boil-up and spare ribs; pen-torch and panadol;
her own man with sad grass growing under his wheels.

*But how can we two start over again, as we once did — at the waterline,
with the bridge rumble overhead, the reassuring flow?*

And further she courses now, towards a yet broader courtyard: “By the year 2050
...”

And tell me, what Maui-tricks will keep us all afloat in those swirling times?

TIHEI MAURIORA!