

Maitai Summer

ROWAN JEFFREY

We built a dam again that year — my last in Nelson.
Five siblings in rare harmony
lugging tumble-smooth boulders
building a wall at the river's narrower bend
creating a swimming hole and spa-pool rapids
to enjoy the whole summer.

Curling behind the house, it was our patch of river
shared with friends
and guarded by ferocious stares when
unsuspecting interlopers dared to descend
from the riverside walkway.

When the memory flashes
I feel the burn of the sun, the first icy dip
the sharpness of stones, my floating hair
I smell seeping hillside slime running off rocks,
hear the laughter, the flapping of towels to scare wasps
and pained screams as over-excited Fred dog
drags her claws down Jay's back
drawing blood for the river to wash away.

It lasted an age that final family summer:
sunshine, swimming, the stretching of
days strangely suspended
with everything still to come and yet
already over —
a no-longer schoolgirl
poised to plunge —
the beginning of just me.

Brother — at 59

ROWAN JEFFREY

At 59 we talk
awkwardly
as if we never spoke before
as if we never shared seventeen years
within the same walls
eating, sleeping, squabbling
competing for scraps of time
and attention
as if we never heard the sound
of each other's voices

The thing is you're leaving again
in two days
for the other side of the world
leaving your son, daughter, new grandchild, mother
and us, your siblings — never close —
yet now time is marching

We talk practicalities but
It's the emotional side that's tough
you say, determinedly tight
and I nod, affirm, though my chest burns
all I can do is listen
try not to muck this up
by overreacting —
you've seen enough tears

You have preferences but
no choice
a January scan will dictate
a return in July
or the alternative —
this visit really being our final
inadequate
goodbye

But we don't talk
about that.

We the downcast

ROWAN JEFFREY

We the downcast
dealt a poor hand
mistaken mistreated or just misaligned
still young unsung
quietly inhabiting the edges
we're missing it seems some vital
spark

Heads bent we half view the world
through lowered lashes and
curtains of hair
soft footed we startle when addressed
our words emerge woolly
our thoughts lie undiscerned while
our slumpy silhouettes soundlessly scream —
we're very sorry
sorry for everything
everything we are and do
and everything that's been done to us
but we don't want to bother
you

Yet we the down
callously cast
are also coals awaiting flame
lit and tended we'll frequently flare
eyes raised necks tall
voices burning with our causes
passions and aspirations
we'll walk hot with purpose
our arms punching high
redefining the sky

Got a match? Anyone?
And time?

Rowan poem

ROWAN JEFFREY

Rowan's a weathered handbag of leather
treasured for soft warm comfort

Rowan's a floppy eared terrier
addicted to walks in the wild

Rowan's a major general
directing troops through their daily chores

Rowan carries everyone's stories
like a soft sucking sponge that needs a good wring

Rowan eats weird words for breakfast
and spits them back out for afternoon tea

Rowan is a bunch of wildflowers
picked in haste from a bee-party meadow

She's a pile of twisted firewood on a desolate beach
yearning to crackle and blaze

Look — see her there and here —
bright copper flashes and burnt freckled smiles
autumn all the year.



Rowan Jeffrey is a Scottish-born Kiwi, psychodrama trainee and educator, who lives in Ōtautahi Christchurch with her twin teenage boys and fox terrier Suzy.