

Roadside Reflections



ROADSIDE

REFLECTIONS

by Phillipa Reeve

Vacancy

Six months high on each other. Hitching to Auckland. Lying in the rain with Leonard Cohen. Sweating to the beat of The Band and then he walks out.

He left me in greyed sheets
in Castle Street
booze and dancing spent
left me
in his flat
staring at concrete
listening to yesterday's
conversations
morning
alone
I packed my past
and went
wondering what the words were
he'd had to run away from

Scarfie Appointment

In '71 grieving meant slipping on a bush-singlet dress and heading out partying, male in-tow to protect the pride. The man I grabbed was more fumbling bore than blind date. One of those snug in cricket whites but lost off the pitch. The sort that keeps lunging forward stumbling over fantasies of late night gropings. Not blind but easy to loose and you were so very easy to find. You with the neon smile, wild hair and angel-sky eyes. You with the bare feet and cords way too short for cool. I didn't know you were a gymnast. It was laughter and fun I saw rippling through your body, making it seem as if life was about to burst you into a dance that could send me spinning.

You said yes to a squash game. My excuse to see you again. It didn't matter I could barely play and you were physedder skilled. It worked. You saw past the gasping beetroot face and said yes to the weekend party at Aromoana.

I'd been taught to ask for what I wanted.

London Street

We walked my antique wooden bed all the way to your London Street flat. Bit by bit borne on our backs like some ancient contract ritual, where family and cows follow later waiting outside, watching for first night blood. But our families were miles away and this procession held no promises nor virgin blood.

Our room had a view of iron palings and footpath-feet. We shared it with your motorbike, guitar, poster of Che Guevara and my dog Kumi. A house of male clutter, music, madness and very little method. The shower three floors up jutted out the side of the house and had a hole in the floor, which meant we watered as we went washing quickly in winter. The kitchen, at servant level, seldom served anything beyond packet rice rissoto and fried eggs with wostershire sauce. Except that is the time it snowed and you and Syd made sleds from the back of chairs and slid down the street right across the intersection. Then Syd's girlfriend cooked duck. We didn't care about having to spit out lead shot. We were awed by her knowledge of orange sauce.

My last flatmates found me messy. In London St I fitted just fine.



"Drifting"

Auckland

The move to Auckland meant entry into a foreign land, where people used the library and handed in work during the year. A pressured world where students studied. A place I wasn't equipped for. Exams were coming. A thick cloud of fear had descended over the university and I needed a way to distract myself from the idea of swotting. With house clean, I went looking for a back up scheme and found one - get married.

You said yes and it worked wonderfully, made a great diversion. I bought two rings from the market. Silver ones for ten dollars. Mine the mask of drama. Yours a plain band. Terracotta velour curtains scored at a car boot sale near Mercury Lane, became dress and jacket, whilst my father's suit cut down made a great groom's outfit. Then came the day in High Street, with parents and friend Dave treading through confetti left by the last lot. The J.P. Tried hard to weave romance around the plastic chairs and form filling, but we were into fun. We posed for photos on Takapuna Beach, drank too much wine at Fisherman's Wharf, then surprised the flatmates who toasted us by drinking champagne from my shoe, while I began to wonder about the words I had committed to.

The Wedding Night Blues

champagne tears

spill doubt

too late

soaking sheets

still stained

by single love

Who's Got The Map

Exploring alleys
chemistry
philosophy
psychology

hunting signs
I can't see
to places unimagined

while you
dependable teacher
cruise down main street
destined
appealing

I ride awhile
behind
clutching certainty
on a blue suzuki
in sheepkin boots
you sewed especially

the 250 dirt bike
with the small sloping seat
broke down in Picton
and threw me back
to thumbs and chance

following was boring anyway.

My Hero

My father pulled you aside when he heard of our wedding plans.

Told you I was a handful.

Asked if you were up to it,

thinking perhaps you could be my saving,

but feeling the male code demanded a warning.

That was before he saw you show my nephews

how to ride a bike standing on the seat

one arm and leg in the air.

You sailed past us down the hill, face alight with triumph

and in one smooth motion disappeared over the cliff.

We all sat silent watching, expecting you to pop back up

with balloons and bells delighting in our surprise.

All except my father who stood shaking his head

muttering your name over and over.

He did quite a lot of that in the following years.

Blemished Beauty – Tickets To Adventure

Trousers homemade
wide-cut for fashion
cheap flammable

Winter cold
hugging heater
screaming

You threw me in
last night's bath
nursed me back
to walking

They saw scars
as damaged assets
paid compensation

Beauty restored
or tickets to the world?

No contest.

Australia Circus Style

Stars staying
in hotel splendor
us on site
in caravans
public entertainment

From muscle
to ring-waiter in red jacket
following elephants
shovelling shit
rigging the lions cage
and Bronley's rocket
you climbed the ranks
to lighting crew
wearing circus status

While I stay trapped
candy floss and
hot dog queen
working concessions
clothes stinking of fat
woman
in a man's world

A world of oddballs
closed and loyal
own law
drugs on call
playing hard
and paying well
pulling us together
ready for the unexpected



"Elephants Aren't Always Metaphorical"

Lost

At 26 a social worker fresh from theory, I believed ideals could solve society, that somehow I'd wave words and pull justice from a hat, while clients smiled in gratitude and amazement. It took more and more wine each day to dull the pain and block the vision of a world without answers. That night after friends went and you rolled away from kisses, I blamed tiredness. You had to tell me twice. I couldn't hear you say that you were leaving. It wasn't until the noise of your bike disappeared around the corner onto Clevedon Road I felt the coldness of alone and started crying. I can't remember stopping. I remember leaving the cottage door open, new stereo the offering, chucking my job yelling at God to take it all and bring you back. And I remember finding Deb a circus mate and driving, driving, driving, trying to outdistance the past and find a place where you still loved me.



"Where are the stars when you need them ?"

Knitting You Back

winding
love
on needles
of longing

plain pearl
promises
in wool

casting spells
spiked
with lanolin
invoking
domestic magic



"Rusted Dreams"

Drowning

Together redirecting youth using mini bikes at the Hastings Y.

Rebuilding our house that turned out to be rotten. A tarp covering the hole that was the back wall. A cold Hastings winter and our son arrives a month early.

You bought a nightie for me and nappies and clothes for the baby.

I was going to get around to it. The youth stole me presents and caused chaos in the ward. He came so small, fitting dolls clothes and crying with colic or outrage at finding himself alone with people who were sinking. My flailing, my calls for help hijacked, given meanings that brought hallmark smiles and phrases of mother's bliss. And you gripped by angst losing your self, your smile, redirecting youth. He screamed for all of us. Would somebody notice and show us the way? On our medical records the doctor described us as 'such a nice family'.

Island Healing

We fled to grandparent support and circus of a different kind. A place where misfits fitted. An island buffered from demands by the rolling journeys of the Baroona and the Iris Moana. There soothed by seas, cradled by community, we rewrote our lives and love

Timeless days of togetherness. The three of us developing unity.

You teaching me to build, wield hammers, become slick with a skill saw and swagger with the best as we picked up timber from the yard with our team of women builders.

We'd balance on rafter sniffing the wind ready to go windsurfing when conditions were right. The Queen Street lawyer couldn't understand why anyone would sign contracts without deadlines, which said we'd be there when we were, when we weren't at the beach, playing with Dylan, or taking long lunches with friends. But that was the island way.

There we healed with herbs and hands, trained in clay play and movement, homeschooled our son, blended with the moon, grew fresh feathers of idealism and tested the air ready for flight.



Out There

Hot sands
scattered with
bullet scarred
cacti and
trailer homes
in places without names

Ojai California to
Taos New Mexico
A Volvo trek
paid for by a mortgage

A search for spiritual
sense and New Age
heights of experience

You flew cessnas
while I went astral style
and Dylan did a low
pass across the car park
in the mouth of the pet wolf
that voted itself
most suitable parent

We moved to the edge
you and me
bound by belief in the unseen
breathing possibilities
and American dreams

Networked

The suits came with glister smiles, glib patter, diamond rings and stories of freedom – financial liberation, the gospel according to Hill echoed by the prophet from Hawaii. The road to young, rich and free. We cheered and clapped but kept on getting poorer, parking the Austin Princess with the particle board back seat around the corner when we went and fished for other's dreams.

We wore the paint
the smiles
the garb
and got lost
in phantoms
sent running
hand in hand
seeking islands
of solid Self.

Back To Being

Means and ends unravelled we look age in the face and journey inside, living the moment, each exploring passion and creativity - music, photography and writing. Reaching for flavours to taste and share. Finding recipes of being.



"In Case You Didn't Hear Me"

Dennis

Tuned to delight
open to
my knowing touch
yielding music
that bathes my heart
and turns my body
melted honey flowing
dancing to the rhythms
of soul



"And Sometimes We Danced Together"

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dr Mary Paul from Massey University for seeing something in me, long before I recognised it myself.

Thanks Dennis for believing in and supporting my creative journey. For that huge smile that met my eager sharing of new writing the moment you walked in the door.

Thanks to all those poets who dug deep and dared to express and share. You gave me inspiration and courage.

Thanks to Nicholas Wilton and Art2Life coaches and tribe for inspiring, teaching and supporting me in my painting explorations.