



Tightrope

Selina
Tusitala
Marsh

With warrior fierceness and perceptive humour, 'Fast-Talking PI' Selina Tusitala Marsh upholds the mana of the Pacific as she walks the tightrope of tradition and culture. 'We are what we remember, the self is a trick of memory . . . history is the remembered tightrope that stretches across the abyss of all that we have forgotten'
– **Maulaivao Albert Wendt**

Selina Tusitala Marsh draws on nursery rhymes, riddles, spells, Pasifika chants, popular song, rap – as well as on high modernist and postmodernist literature – to produce a new collection that is spiky and fierce, brash and vital, by turns, comic, irreverent, poignant, rhapsodic, anthemic, confrontational.
– **David Eggleton**

Selina Tusitala Marsh's *Tightrope* takes us from the bustle of the world's largest Polynesian city, Auckland, through Avondale and Apia, and on to London and New York on an extraordinary poetic voyage. In Marsh's poetry, sharp intelligence combines a focused warrior fierceness with perceptive humour and energy, upheld by the mana of the Pacific. She mines rich veins – the tradition and culture of her whānau and Pacific nations; the works of feminist poets and leaders; words of distinguished poets Derek Walcott and Albert Wendt – to probe the particularities of words and cultures.

Dr Selina Tusitala Marsh is of Samoan, Tuvaluan, English and French descent. She was the first Pacific Islander to graduate with a PhD in English from the University of Auckland and is now an associate professor in the English department, specialising in Pasifika literature. Her first collection, the bestselling ***Fast Talking PI***, won the NZSA Jessie Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry in 2010. Marsh represented Tuvalu at the London Olympics Poetry Parnassus event in 2012; her work has been translated into Ukrainian and Spanish and has appeared in numerous forms live in schools, museums, parks, billboards, print and online literary journals. As Commonwealth Poet (2016) she composed and performed a poem for the Queen at Westminster Abbey.



Queens I have met

Dr Ngahuia

You wear royalty
on your chin
moko kauae
marks spirit kin of another queen
Te Arikinui Dame Te Ātairangikaahu
hawk of the morning sky
the longest glide
over Taupiri mountain
an unmarked grave framed
by Tyrian purple roses.
Your crowning hair
now spiky and short
is flecked by degrees
an MA on Frame
a PhD on Te Arawa
your people, Tūhoe, Waikato
your black leather robe flows
your Westminster is made
from Aotearoa clay
your rituals
vestibules of karakia
story, scholarship
lit in hollow alcoves
of stone, bone, flesh
Queen Tahuri.

HRH Elizabeth II

Nine decades
of blue linen rule
the longest ever
we were both born
on April 21st
you in '26
me in '71
when we meet
kanohi ki te kanohi
I am exactly half your age
and for a second
think to mention it
when bowing
shaking your petite gloved hand
after you asked about the poem
a flock of frigates flying
on the Sacrarium Steps

*How did you memorise it all?
I'm a poet, Your Majesty, it's my job.
Yes, yes, I suppose it is.*

Boucheron blue irises
set in the cool parchment
of your skin
lines written into Britain's history
powder-blue hat, white gloves
(changed to black in the
running of the crowd)
you are twelve sick days off
from sixty-four years of royal duty
it takes an Eckhart moment
but in those few
seconds, when we

exchange breath
we are both
Queens of the Commonwealth.

Oprah

You are the
royal 'O'
by common decree
via talk show TV
offering up the stage's platter
serving the *hors d'oeuvres* of our lives
36,000 interviews
from first black President to local resident
Yes-We-Can Obama to Ari-the-hoarder.
You share with us
at Vector Arena
that after every interview
no matter who you speak to
they all ask: *Was that ok?*
What you hear is: *Am I ok?*
You recite by memory
Caribbean king
Derek Walcott's
Love After Love.
I met him
in St Lucia
he signed my book
shook my hand
couldn't stand
because of the stroke
the day before.

In the crowd
we three lean in
kanohi ki te kanohi.

Alice Walker

Your shawl-sprawling
universe wraps
all the words
as we are pulled in
to the spinning stories
defying the gravity
of racism, sexism, history.

We are about to step
on stage at Aotea Centre
in front of a sold-out
crowd of two thousand
I ask
How would you like to walk on –
before me or after me?
You say
Let's just do this
and take my hand.
We stroll on
side by side
to a standing ovation
your hands become doves
criss-crossing above your heart
winging blessing and thanks
over fields of lavender
nodding to the wind's
womanist wisdom

welcome home Queens
welcome to yourselves.

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