



ANNE
KENNEDY

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WALKS
INTO A
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For Elizabeth Caffin
whose editorial vision has lit my way

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The house is quiet now
And still.

No gale from the sea
No weeping in the garden
Or cry from the hill.

Later there will be
Stars and a moon
Tomorrow the sun.

J. C. Sturm, 'Untitled'

1

Flood Monologue

You never discussed the stream
and no doubt the stream didn't want

your discourse (its own merry way)
but now that you live by the stream

a mosquito has come up the bank
and bitten you, and the stream

is in your bloodstream. You buff
the site of entry like a trophy

Your chuckling new acquaintance
takes your cells out to the sea.

*

It goes all night, you tell your friends
drinking wine to warm the house

(already warm), and laugh of course
like a drain. Later in your roomy

queen you listen to its monologue –
ascending plane that never reaches

altitude. Your fingers stretch
from coast to coast to try it out,

this solitude, while water thumps
through the riverbed.

*

You're not exactly on your own.
Teenagers come and go, the screen-door
clacks, cardinals mob a little temple
hanging in a tree. A neighbour with a bag
of seeds asks you if you mind
the birds. There is that film, and the flu,
but no. In the mornings earlyish
you slide the rippling trees across
(Burnham Wood) and watch
six parrots lift like anti-gravity.

*

At sunset a rant about the dishes –
you've worked all day, unlike
some people! The tap runs. The sun,
tumbling over Waikiki, shoots through
the trees, gilds the stream (unnecessary),
stuns you in the empty room. Every day

or ten years (you realise, standing there)
you've crossed the bridge etched Mānoa

Stream, 1972, back and forth,
except the day the river rose.

*

Some facts: mongooses (sic) (introduced)
pee into the current, plus rats and mice,

the stream is sick. All the streams.
Mosquitoes – your messengers and those

that bit the teenagers whose young blood
is festive like the Honolulu marathon –

could carry West Nile virus. Often fatal.
Probably don't, are probably winging it

like you, and you will go your whole life
and only die at the end of it.

*

The stream doesn't *look* sick. It takes
a pretty kink near your apartment.

The trees are lush and spreading
like a shade house you once walked in

in a gallery (mixed media). The water
masks its illness like a European noble

with the plague – a patina, and ringlets.
You're pissed about the health issues

of the stream, and healthcare, because
it has your blood, you have its H₂O.

*

You think it's peaceful by the stream?
Ducks rage, waking you at 2am,

or thereabouts. Mongooses hunt
the duck eggs, says your son. Ah, you say.

That night the quacks are noisy, but
you fret in peace. Sometimes homeless

people sleep down by the river bank.
Harmless. One time one guy had a knife.

They still talk about it and you see him
ghostly like an app against the trees.

*

All your things are near the stream,
beds, plates, lamps – you're camping

apart from walls and taps and electricity.
Your laptop angles like a spade,

and clods of English warm the room
(already warm). They warm your heart.

Overall you have much less, because
of course – divided up. But you're lucky

or would be if the stream was squeaky
clean, and talked to you.

*

The stream had caused a little trouble
in the past, i.e., the flood. Not its fault.

900,000 people pave a lot, they plumb
a lot. Then rain like weights. From a safe

distance (your old apt) you watched
your little watercourse inflate and thunder

down the valley taking cars, chairs, trees.
You saw a mother and her baby rescued

from a van – a swimming coach, with ropes –
the van then bumped out to sea.

*

One apartment in your complex
took in water in the flood. And mud. It was

this apartment. You've known it all along,
of course, because you watched.

They fixed it up. Lifted carpets, blasted
fans for a week. Repainted.

It's pretty good. The odd door
needs a shoulder still. In certain lights

though, on the wall, a watermark,
the stream's dappled monogram.

*

You're talking clichés – water under
the bridge, love letter from a lawyer,

serious harm, sunk without you.
The stream has been into your bedroom,

and you in its. Remember reeds, coolness,
summer afternoons. You loved

the stream. Its stinging waters send
a last message in lemon juice:

fevered me, infected,
flooded me.

If I'm fucked,
you're coming with me.

Sincerely,
the stream.