



Tūnui | Comet

Robert Sullivan

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'*Tūnui | Comet* displays all the elegance, eloquence and craft one would expect from this Māori writer, who is one of the outstanding poets of his generation. This is a distinctive and rich collection about unity and location, using the compass of poetry to celebrate our archipelago of islands. Robert Sullivan has deftly fused the classicism of the European tradition with Māori animism and a new world wonder, even as he defamiliarises the ordinary.' — David Eggleton

'Sullivan's work is like a great camera: an eye in the sky that shows us all of who we are, then zooms right in to the specifics of the individual within the wider Māori identity. Under this *Tūnui* we are both the individual and the collective; the past and the future entwined in the poet's words. Sullivan is shapeshifter, time traveller, descendant and ancestor. We are all welcomed into the wharenuī that this book has become.' — Ruby Solly

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*Dedicated to my mother,
Maryann Teaumihi*

Tētahi Waerea (Prayer of Protection)

Clouds are habits
over the seabed north and south
feeding mineral salts
spreading the eels' tails
and the eels' mouths.
Taniwha all of them.
Taniwha swimming to the Waikato,
taniwha in their weirs
in the Nōta (up home)
all the way to Tonga.

The eel in me is a taniwha
who protects, who swims, who speaks
in bubbles, who meows with whiskers
on fields, who slides in esses,
who babies, who plays with kina
softly, tentatively, between
anemones and shell-shuttling
crabbies lit in mild pink,
but as an eel I am dark.

The wannabe guitarist in me is a soloist
with a mike, on a stool, guitar
resting on my knee, song
pitched to my throat
sharing a Maisey Rika lyric.
Yeah, right.

Can't do the work for him, and I can't do the work for her.
Can share this. About Te Whare o tō mātou mātua tūpuna
and how our songs and voices in te reo Māori
lifted me with many pairs of arms
so I had wings again. Ka ora ka ora.
Thank you very much: ngā mihi nunui e te whānau.

Yes, I speak plainly, when I hear your voice,
bringing the unseen chains of a grandfather clock
and a Polynesian paddle into the conversation.
We stand tall before we play the clock out
past the reef toward Matariki. Clouds raise
their fists as seagulls and sparrows swoon
into the rainbow. It has been a long homecoming
and he has made the pieces one.

Māui's Mission

In the warmth of night I put feet to my plan: waited for my brothers to sleep. They'd spent the day sharpening their hooks, repairing the great net, filling gourds with fresh water. They'd bundled taro wrapped in leaves sitting below the cross seats. The bundles and the net would cover me, especially if I said the chant to slow my movement and my breathing. The moon became brighter like a huge fish eye as the chant hooked me.

I was holding my grandmother's hook so tightly a little cut welled red between my closed knuckles. 'Good morning, brothers,' I called and they cussed and moaned until the next chant took us a further hundred miles and then another until my chanting made them gasp as we settled on a patch of ocean black with fish. They forgave me, not that it matters. I took the bloody hook and said my business to the ocean. It worked. The fish rose and our descent was secured.