



BANK OF NEW ZEALAND KATHERINE MANSFIELD AWARD

RUNNER-UP: My First Kiss

Daniel Satele

ben asked to borrow my lighter.

We sat on the library steps and smoked and talked for a long time. i invited him back to my place to see some of my recent paintings – purple and grey moths. he said he really liked them...

then he kissed me

i thought 'oh my god'

i'd never been kissed before

his tongue was large and uncomfortable the way he pushed it so urgently inside my mouth. his stubble scratched my face

but it felt good like my head had been split open and all those moths were flying out

i kept laughing. wanting to cry

because it felt so good

i tried my hardest to kiss him well but i could only go by what i'd seen on the movies since i'd never been kissed before.

my mouth kept wanting to say 'i love you' but i held it in my throat because it would sound so stupid. how could i when i didn't even *like* him like that?

there is a problem with the misinterpreted metaphor

my body speaks to people that i am 'polynesian'. but my actions don't say that – they're just normal. this pleases the schoolteachers that make me a Prefect and smile to themselves.

there's no word for me – so they can't read me

i do not know samoa. i went there once, but its language is lost to me

i only know it's mosquitos and violence, and it's God – everywhere God God Jesus Holy Ghost

God. i know its heat, and how no one gives you any privacy

over there, when you eat meat you can recognise the animal that it is. the chicken actually looks like a chicken – the pork literally is pig

the little bits of bone aren't even removed when they serve it –

over there meat is not a metaphor

i hit him

i pull his hair, pushing him to the ground. he wouldn't stop. wouldn't. wouldn't stop saying those words at me. calling me those names. using those words for *me*.

i'm shaking. i push him into the ground, my body shaking. he yells "*Stop It You BITCH*". my fingernails dig into his arms. i can't.

he pushes me off him, hits my face, my head.

i can't feel it but

i cry.

i really hate my brother sometimes.

i first met ben in art class.

his hair was blond-brown, thin, and overgrown, quite long – for a boy. he wore glasses, old jeans, cream shirt with sleeves rolled up. a leather satchel. skinny.

his work was very good.

i saw a vagina once

in the public toilets. in a photo of a naked woman. her hair was all messy and her mouth sort of hung half open – like she was having trouble breathing. her make-up was thick. and her breasts so large and round – 'they must be heavy' i thought. her nipples were dark, pointed like sparrows beaks. her legs were spread awkwardly. between was a purple pink hole encircled by dark fur – with something slender, shiny, fleshy pink-red poking up from inside her. i remember how it seemed so like a penis...

after the night of free flying moths

i see ben at school the next morning. he still is that boy – skinny and pale, but i see beauty in him. not in his body. it is not literal.

We Have Translated Each Other.

now his eyes are full of grey and purple. there is light caught on the veins of his hands and the white hairs of his arms. there is energy on his breath...

when i was in samoa

my little cousins would always call me a fa'afafine – “you're just like a girl”

over there that's not exactly a bad thing. they would laugh, but not how they'd laugh here. this was a samoan laugh, i'm not sure why but they laugh at everything. over there. i think it's just because it's fun to laugh.

one day one of my cousins laughed a samoan laugh and said

“i know the fa'apalagi for fa'afafine”

she gave a fat smile and another laugh

“faggot” she said triumphantly – proud of her fa'apalagi

i didn't react

“fag-got” she repeated, carefully pronouncing the english

“you don't know what that word means”

“yes i do – fa'afafine”

“No, they're different words – they don't mean the same thing”

“fag-got”!

“don't say that word. don't say that Word. Don't Ever say that to Anyone Ever Again, you don't understand what it means....”

the shower

comes slowly without heat or pressure or sound – just pricking my skin. i close my eyes and become coloured energy, the water is rainbow lightening electricity, everything else black

i ride down the hill on a ferris wheel. i am at a *real* circus.

at Queen Street everyone begins singing and dancing. i'm in a real musical.

catching the bus is hard.

i keep thinking that one is coming but is just a trick of the lights and darks. they aren't buses at all, but taxis or sometimes vans.

i'm happy, so happy

now i am in a childhood place. i have collected my acorns for the winter, and with my magic pot we will never run out of porridge. "*we'll never be hungry again mum*". here everything is alive and talking to me. i am safe "*there's nothing to worry about dear*"

here, in this place, i am an adorable little girl. with soft golden curls. and a red thing around my neck with gold embroidered flowers.

and then sometimes i'm brown again, and poor – or maybe just poor? i'm barefoot on the summer footpath and going for milk. but it's okay, in the end i will become a millionaire, or else it will be discovered that i am really a princess.

then i'm in the old tv shows. i'm best friends with mary tyler (or was it taylor?) moore and i'm funny and popular. chachi arcola and i 'go steady' – he is the first to kiss me, behind a haystack at the country fair ... greg brady takes me to the prom where we waltz, he gives me my first kiss.... and chip or chuck or whoever the eldest of *my three sons* was – he puts his arm around my shoulders in his car, under the stars, up at that high place overlooking the town... and kisses me, my first kiss.

at school

she exclaimed “i didn’t know you had a brother. how come i’ve never seen him before?”

i reply, “he doesn’t like me.”

“what? what do you mean?”

“he doesn’t like to be seen in public with me. he avoids me, so that no one will find out we’re related. i think he’s embarrassed of me or something. i don’t know. we’re just very different, you know. he’s into cars and sports and things... it’s okay at home, he just... i don’t know”

ben

kisses me sometimes. or i him.

if or when moths fly.

we have not fallen in love

we have not fallen in anywhere

we have not fallen in

we have not fallen

we have not

we have

we

we have

we have lifted – elevated – we are at a place that we don’t have words for. we’ve never seen it on tv (on *home and away* last night they said ‘friends don’t kiss’) – or heard about it on the radio (in that place where ‘love’ is ‘sent from above/...down/...ground/...sky/...high’) – it’s just there – just happening – just this ‘not-in-love’ – this ‘should-be-more-than-friendship’ – this ‘_____’.

i go to a party

a friend whispers

“soooo.... what’s happening between you and ben ay?”

“nothing. we’re friends” (i exhale smoke slowly, casually)

“well, apparently you were looking pretty ‘friendly’ on Friday night. charlotte said she saw you guys holding hands....”

“yeah? probably. we’re just close. you know. girls do stuff like that all the time”

“oh come on... don’t give me that. guys don’t just hold hands”

“yeah well....”

(she blows smoke extravagantly into the air) “listen babe, you can tell me”

“there’s nothing to tell. i’d tell you if there was but there’s not. i don’t know how to explain it. sometimes we hold hands, sometimes we kiss....”

“WHAT? are you serious?” (her eyes widen and gleam)

“Shhhhh.....”

“are you Serious? – you guys just randomly hook up?”

“i wouldn’t exactly use those words, but we...”

“hey listen babe, shit like that’s pretty risky. don’t get hurt, alright. you don’t wanna get hurt...”

“i won’t. we’re just friends, it’s just a thing, it’s... hard to explain....”

(she narrows her eyes) “honestly man, you better watch out because someone will get hurt, someone will always end up wanting more and then....”

“but it’s not like that....”

“so... i don’t get it. do you *like* him?” (eyes slightly widen. her whole face arches at me through the smoke hanging between us)

“... i don’t *like* like him. but, i mean..... I Love Him, it’s just...”

“so.... what? Are You *Sleeping* With Him? (her eyes narrow now, cutting at me sideways)

“no. No! it’s not... i could never.... it’s so not like that. it’s like, like, how you’d love a brother or something...”

“sounds pretty dodgy to me. someone’s gonna get hurt.

- honestly babe, take it from me,

All Boys Are Bastards.”

oh my god

that wasn't my first kiss. when i was seven and my brother was six we were curious about why everyone on *days of our lives* was always kissing. so one night we tried it, and then we knew why.... that was my first kiss.