



Language Barrier

When you can't speak the language
you hide out a lot in cafés
in countries where everyone still lights up cigarettes
you fear someone asking
for a match or if the empty seat
at your table is free
or for extra sugar sachets or
whether you think the dessert
is worth having or if the waitress
has gone nuts.

It's all those simple topics
that you take for granted
now you have to learn everything
from the bottom up.

You avoid eye contact for talking
becomes an act of asphyxiation like an
awkward backwards movement of
an unpractised gymnast you lose
the ability to breath
to think
to communicate.

I wonder if Marco Polo felt the same way
when he entered Kubla Kahn's court
and how many languages and dialects
he needed to negotiate to cross the earth
(if indeed he ever did so).

But I'll drink my coffee
and eat my cake
hide behind my screen
watch the rain start to
fall heavier by the minute overflowing
the flower baskets and stew
in the togetherness of not being
connected.



When Cities Die

Each day a city dies;
yet another one deceased
today as the birds flew
over and took up residence
in the Pohutukawa.

You held my hand
as we walked by
the water's edge.
The stars became
their own astrologers.

We were two ends of a lost
argument. You pointed to
a dead sun. The water withdrew.
What else is there to say on
the edge of a black sea?

Slowly the hills fill with shadows
and where we walk our footsteps
fill with water; no evidence.
Perhaps tomorrow we will
stroll together down an open road
looking for new instalments
of dead winters.



Those We Leave Behind

We used to call him
the millionaire vagrant
due to him once living
a grand lifestyle in a Chatswood
2-storey house with a fountain
in the back garden.

He threw it all in, walked out one
morning and never looked back
not even at the tabby who watched
him stroll away with its remaining
seven lives.
A gift to him.

He lived under the harbour bridge
the North Shore side, with the unflattering
plaque detailing the death toll.
I would catch sight of him as I rode
the 7am bus to a job in an office block in downtown
gripping onto my clipped bus ticket
thinking I was superior in my polished cheap shoes
my mother bought me.
The type of job he avoided. But I came to understand.

Even then I knew he was right, deep down.
He wore nothing on his feet
not even in winter
as he trudged through puddles.
He didn't beg, he ate from the backs of fast food joints.
His uncle was a famous journalist

his parents were university professors
I imagined in Philosophy, as I knew Philosophy
would drive anyone to live on the streets.
I'd see him late at night walking through the canopy
of shops the lights illuminating his bruised torment.

I always thought about the story of the cat he left
behind.

Bionote:

Lincoln Jaques is a Tāmaki Makaurau based writer. His poetry, fiction, travel essays and book reviews have appeared in Aotearoa, the USA, Asia, the United Kingdom and Australia, including *Landfall*, *Takabē*, *Live Encounters*, *Tough Magazine*, *Noir Nation*, *Burrow*, *Book of Matches*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *The Spinoff Friday Poem*, *Blackmail Press*, *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook* and *Mayhem*. He was the Runner-Up in the 2022 IWW Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems. He was guest editor for



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