

## NANCY KEESING

### TO TOWNSVILLE, 1980

#### 1. Getting There

At 30,000 feet of brilliant air  
Give or take a couple of thous. for those  
Who listen too late, or always fail to hear  
the captain's or first officer's crackling voice,

From these most mercifully non-metric skies  
The flanks of the Great Divide seem slashed; their veins  
Emptying in rivers that snake beyond two windows  
And bleed through webs to soaks on squared-off plains,

While starboard sight glares over filmy skin  
Of terrible blue that's acne-ed into islands  
Ringed by pale pus.

Ears will explode and deafen;  
Eyes, this high, must listen to heightened silence.

#### 2. Arriving

The noises of disaster and despair  
In every city magnify through air.  
The higher the storey of your hotel room  
The worse your windows shriek of death and doom.

#### 3. Walking

On the door of the shut-window cottage a sign reads:  
"MORGUE.  
NO UNAUTHORISED ENTRY." Never. Oh Never!  
The opposite hospital towers from lawns; a rose  
Is pruned by a gardener. This grass nobody mows.

4. "Your comments please" (Will enable the Management  
of this hotel to maintain a high standard of service etc. etc. etc.)

- i) Three pelicans have, three times, flown past my window.  
I am unaccustomed to being at the level of flying pelicans.  
They have power and grace; they jut their beaks  
    optimistically and with far sight.  
They make me feel old, fat, earthbound, ungainly, myopic.  
This is not luxury. This is far from right.
- ii) Late afternoon I'm enchanted by the music of a band  
And lean from your balcony, thoughtfully provided.  
Cheated! No marching girls. Colonel Bogey is canned.
- iii) Your outdoor pavement restaurant is heaven.  
All very well.  
But the five malnourished alchos. (three men, two women)  
Who have just staggered past from a pavement bar  
Are in hell.  
    This contrast causes inner  
    Guilt and spoils my dinner.
- iv) Your Souvenir Shop  
What ever has coral done to deserve this fate?  
Can these millions of polyp-builders be re-incarnations  
Of wicked souls eternally doomed to create  
Sulphurous roses and vile sky-blue carnations?

If so, this nautilus carafe was surely at least  
Some dungeon-keeper or hangman. Consider whose hell  
Must lurk on many a family mantelpiece  
Damned by innocent taste and misguided good will.

5. In the Mall

The young black girls of Darwin frisk  
And scuff on legs like whippy sticks.

But Townsville women tread on trees  
Of bronze and polished ebony.

An old one creeps on twisted bone  
Thinned to black snags. The shady brim  
Of her hat's wound with a bright flower wreath  
"Death" would serve, but I'll write: "Breath."