

*A Poem in Two Cantos*

# THE SACRED SKY

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MARK TARREN



*Canto*

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Here, daughters —  
here is our breath,

it is not the wind,  
nor the sound of a broken branch,

it is our gift,

the whisper of a falling star  
for you to hold.

Here is the white tapa —

we crafted it for you  
before the time of tears,

wear it upon your sacred body  
as power and strength,

for the heavens fall at your feet now

now —

beside your sleeping breath  
and your very last sorrow

we beat the tapa,

with whalebone and wood  
we sing your names —

forever moving,  
backwards and forwards

binding and weaving,  
away and towards

the echo that we cannot hold.

Here is the tiputa —

we crafted it for you  
to protect your heart,

for you are our glory.

Here is the red earth —  
we have dug it from

The Sacred Sky

it is our gift,

we place it on your womb  
and in your hands,

for you are the conscience of the earth.

There are many leaves to mark your body.

Here are twelve leaves  
for healing,

twelve stones in the pools of memory.

Here, daughters —

here are our names.

They are our gift,

our breath —

Mauatua

Vahineatua

Tehuteatuaonoa

Teatuahitia

Toofaiti

Tevarua

Teraura

Teio

Opuarai

Mareva

Tinafanea

Fa' ahotu

The sound you hear through the pines.

It is not the wind. It is not the wind.

It is not the wind.



*Canto*

II

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Remember —

scars become our tribal calligraphy  
when our faces are stolen from us.

Remember, remember —

Mauatua —

carries your grief  
in her power and strength,

from the edge of her hands  
falls the soil  
beneath your sacred feet.

Her breath is your breath.

It is the seed that grows  
in the garden between  
knowing and unknowing.

She is The Strong Tree —

whose roots grow deeply

beneath the quiet ache  
of your healing.

She collects the salt from  
the small shallow pools —

those unfinished stones  
of your tears.

She has removed the page  
in your communal

Book of Forgetting

for she clothes you  
in fine white tapa —

her sacrament of remembrance.

Vahineatua —

who birthed the glory of  
your children.

Her womb was pierced in

The Time Before

and from that great wound

escaped three small birds

to fly alongside  
the horizon of your life,

beneath all the quiet maps  
of the uncharted self.

Tehuteatuaonoa —

has set you free —

along the shores of childhood,  
in the caverns of sleep,

she places the tamanu leaf,

which the wind gently lifts  
from the water.

Teatuahitia —

her spirit rises  
from the weight of your beauty.

She lives and sleeps

in the quiet room  
of your body

in the place before —

The Shadows of Innocence

always rising, always rising,

for awake or asleep,

you are the first witness to life.

Toofaiti —

sings the warning song  
to protect your children.

The echo of that song

is your heartbeat.

The eternal music of blood and water.

Tevarua —

in her universe of sadness,  
she suffered the two great wounds —

those of sky and earth.

Now she sleeps in the bed of  
soil and stars,

lives forever in the

Winds of Memory.

Teraura —

in the moonlight dances  
the Dance of Life.

She beats the calabashes  
and the ihara,

to chase away the darkness —

and the children laugh,

for they do not understand  
how much she loves them.

They did not know of

The Great Theft

or of the many acts of thievery to come.

Her bare feet to naked earth,  
her tapa cloth —

a ritual of colour for your body.

One eye to view the stars,  
that gently retreat from her hand.

Teio —

brings the dawn  
in the innocence and shape of  
The First Child.

Opuarai —

fell from the heavens with

light and bone,  
sand and ash.

She carries the  
fragrance of identity

that always travels with you,  
nestled safely in the embrace

of your name.

Mareva —

sails between fire and water,  
from island to island,

gifts falling like tears  
from her canoe.

Tinafanea —

is the movement of the dance  
that advances towards you,

circles around you —

she is the hush in the tall grass,  
the whisper at the end of  
your fingertips,

the mist between you  
and this human kiss.

Fa' ahotu —

is your mother.

You are the fruit of her creation,

Her Spoken Word.

In the richness of tongues,  
she carries with her your past.

Your one singular world  
is her breath.

Do not be afraid.

For when we stepped into the moon

we left you it's light.

When we broke off the branch  
of the banyan tree

we left you it's shade.

Do not be afraid.

For when you look into  
the still waters,

we will always see your face.

It is the binding of the pages  
of our story,

in the collective memory  
of our hearts longing —

for each other.



## *About the Author*

Mark Tarren is a poet and writer who lives on remote Norfolk Island in the South Pacific.

A Pushcart nominee, his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in various literary journals including *The New Verse News*, *The Blue Nib*, *Poets Reading The News*, *Street Light Press*, *Spillwords Press*, *Tuck Magazine* and *Impspired Magazine*.

As part of his *commitment to place*, Mark's poetry pays homage to living on Norfolk Island and his connection to its natural wonders, birdlife, bountiful land and sea, turbulent history, resilient people and their living culture.

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