

KARARAINA MELBOURNE-GIBSON

Pohutukawa

Pohutukawa, with flowers as red as the paint that coats my marae, and branches as abundant as my whakapapa. Pohutukawa is also a star; a star for our loved ones who have passed away, a star to guide the dead to Te Waka Wairua o Tama Rereti.

Ko Pohutukawa tōku ingoa, Pohutukawa is the name. My mum named me Pohutukawa because I was conceived under the biggest Pohutukawa tree in the world! Pretty mean aye? You would think she named me Pohutukawa because my red cheeks reminded her of those flowers, or because my eyes shine like stars - those damn stars. I live on the East Coast of New Zealand, in the small town of Te Araroa, where the biggest Pohutukawa tree also resides. A place where the birds can swim, the fish can fly, and where you can get an ice block at the shop for free! It's also where my missus lives. She comes to visit me now and then, but I usually just follow that amateur around, sticking to her like a fly on a bloody teko; at least this teko is an East Coast teko. The East Coast provides only the best of everything! Best kina, best awa, best stags, and the best kōtiro. Have you met an East Coast girl? They're pretty fly, they make me wanna touch the sky; they make me wanna pop their tops off with my lighter. My East Coast girl is as beautiful as Rehua on a hot summer night. What the fuck is this lovey-dovey shit? You know, I was never into stars until I met her; Kamaea Rora.

Pohutukawa shines bright in winter, a cold breeze bit my cheeks while I sat with my fishing rod, hoping Tangaroa would send a fish my way. Matariki sitting on the horizon marking the Māori new year, Te Matahi o te Tau.

Kamaea and I used to go fishing together, we would spend hours on the wharf and not catch a single thing. That's how I got into those stars, because while the sun set, we'd watch the sky turn from hues of blue, to hues as red as Pohutukawa, right until the night turned dark with specks of light in the sky. We'd sit with nothing but our rods, fish bait, honey soy chicken chips, and those damn stars. I'd try to scare her; tell her there are aliens in the sky, but she was always a smart ass and taught me about star constellations, star clusters, about Matariki, and tell me that I'm a star! I like my story more. The amount of shit I would spit while sitting under those stars; I used to tell Kamaea about my dreams of becoming a rapper, like Homebrew and Scribe, rapping about the shit that used to cross my mind. I think that's why I liked her, because I would start talking about the aliens in the sky and even though it was bullshit, she always listened and understood me. That's pretty hard to come by, but fuck those nights were cold.

Pohutukawa in spring, calm seas, new beginnings and lamb tails with ales. I sit at the beach with my rod, honey soy chips and my honey-bunny-baby-boo. Nights getting warmer and the scent of flowers filling the air.

I liked Kamaea and fishing was no longer the only thing she wanted to do with me. I'd write raps comparing her to Hiwaiterangi, because she was making my wet dreams come true. Loving Kamaea was a fatal attraction; we could make a prodigy, light, camera, action. I can smell her when she comes around the corner, or when her body is wet and soaking in the water. You can't even imagine

all the things I'd do, cause she's my honey-bunny-baby-boo. So, let's runaway no worries, sitting in a plane full of Pākehā and just a couple of horis, but I'm like 'fuck this shit', I'm gonna buy me a jet, and Kamaea and I will go to another fucken planet. She always liked listening to me talk shit; the way she'd roll her eyes and laugh at my senselessness. I was never the sharpest knife at the marae, but man could I take care of my missus. I did love her, I loved her as much as Tawhirimatea loved his parents. But it's always calm before a storm.

Pohutukawa in the summer, flowering with bright red petals, tree trunks as strong as my dad, and roots as deep as the lyrics that fell from my pen to this paper. Water as warm as my nanny's hugs, but the skies were as grey as my koro's beard.

Waves crashing at my feet, birds singing a sweet fucken melody, Kamaea next to me, her cheeks redder than mine, and the touch of her lips in the way she kissed. The sound of her voice with the way she spoke, reminds me of my mother, that soft sweet love you hear with every word spoken. My mum passed away when I was young. Suicide. I didn't understand at the time, her smile could light up a whole room, and her hugs wrapped me in a summer-like warmth. She was a music lover, would write songs and sing her heart out. She'd sing me a lullaby "Kaua e tangi Pohutukawa e, kaare he take mō o umere, ko au ko koe, ko koe ko au, hi aue aue, kaua e tangi Pohutukawa e." I think she was trying to tell me that she'll always be with me. Those are the only words I could remember falling from her mouth. My dad says that I remind him of her; the way I love with my whole heart, the way I take things too seriously, and the way my eyes shine like Pohutukawa - I think that's why he has a hard time looking at me. Still, I try to fight like my dad, ride like my dad, and he'll never see me cry, because like my dad, I'm as strong as the trunk of that damn Pohutukawa tree. But my mother and I shared love for music; I'd write

rap to express myself through this cheesy ass thing called creativity, and it's saved me once or twice, but everything has a limit for its longevity. I'd compare my dad to Rehua, "Antares, where is he? Why won't he fuck with me?" My dad started using drugs, his mind drifting further and further away, becoming abusive and crazy. Still, I take care of him, washing his ass, forcing him to eat, and trying to hide that fucken meth from him. But it has a way of creeping into dark corners of my whare. If it isn't our own killing us, then I don't know what is. My uncle no longer shows his face at the marae. Rehua is a star associated with summer, a god associated with kindness and love. But fuck, was he missing this summer.

Pohutukawa and it's autumn leaves, green but dry to the touch. Dull days and constant rainstorms flooding the rivers and wrecking the roads. The East Coast became isolated by the pressure of those thunderstorms. The East Coast and me becoming one.

Kamaea would sit with me while my dad sat on the couch blazed out from last night's hit. Sometimes I'd wonder if he'd ever wake up. Kamaea would help me get my mind off things; she believed in me, and even tried to write a rap, but she should stick to her stars and I'll stick to the bars. Through it all, she was my muse. The curves of her face, the way she smiled would spark one hundred different lines I could write about fucken beauty. She would encourage me to pursue music but honestly, I think she was the only one who ever listened, the only one who ever cared. Even though she believed in me, I never once believed in myself. I was insecure and every line I wrote, I thought was shit. I think she saw something in me, but I was weak, and I let her down. She needed me and I fucken failed. It was the eve of winter, celebrations for the Māori new year, and as I raised my glass, her bright eyes were out of sight, no longer rolling at my

ridiculous jokes. So, I searched for her, in this crowd of brown skin; she was lost and it felt as if I no longer understood the stars. I couldn't find her, and I did not understand why. She shone as bright as Parearau without trying, but her light was so fucken dim. Something was wrong. I could feel a cold breeze creeping up my neck, "Where the fuck are you, Kamaea?" Fearful as I near my father's bedroom, peeking through the cracks, I see her and my heart drops. Kamaea being forced down by the corrupt hands of my father as he performs like Tane upon Hinetītama. I rush in, but I'm too late as the cunt has already fucken sneezed.

Pohutukawa in the winter, sitting on the horizon, so dim the streetlights shone brighter. A constant breeze of cold air crawling up my spine, quilt, weakness and fucken shame. Yet one star still shone bright, I could now spot Pohutukawa from thousands of fucken light years away.

Trying to scribble some sense into these words, but finding it hard to express myself. My muse was missing, Kamaea's smile was out of sight; she no longer held a fishing rod and sat with me. Clouds of shame and weakness filled my fucken head, that night replaying in my mind like a broken record. I lost her, she's no longer my honey-bunny-baby-boo. Her eyes no longer roll at my words, and my skin misses her damn touch. She believed in me like I believed in those aliens. She pushed me like Tane pushed his parents apart. She loved me like Hiwaiterangi loved granting wishes. We were like Bonnie and Clyde, Zac and Gabriella, Rangi and Papa. But love doesn't last, and even gods as strong as Rangi and Papa could not hold on to each other. So, fuck this lovely-dovey shit. I'd been alone since the day my mother left; rhymes hadn't been the same and beats sound like fucken sirens ringing in my head. I never needed my dad and his bullshit, his 'Jake the Muss' mates and cowardly ways. My mother needed a man, and his actions spoke louder

than the melodies my mother would sing, and now more than ever I feel closer to my mother while standing next to my father. So, I did it. I ripped my heart out and threw it to the sky to be closer to the stars, to be closer to my mother. Following the light of Pohutukawa leading me closer to the water, in the midst of sorrow and pain I see her, Kamaea, with a fishing rod and fucken bait. My arms wrapped her as if she could feel my touch, and her body slowly moved into my arms with tears rolling down her face. I look to the sky, and I see Te Waka o Tama Rereti, ready to take that leap into the sea. I look back; I see the stars in her eyes. Pohutukawa shone brighter in Kamaea's eyes, so I stuck to her like a fly on a bloody teko.

The last verse.

*Drowning my suicidal thoughts into raps and rhymes, Telling myself feeling like this is a bitch's crime; old man wore a suit as thick as dime.
 Maybe that's why the old man will never see me cry.
 Maybe this time he can grab a knife and fucken cry;
 Holding up a tough front for a little rough cunt.
 Burying his runt for some hotshots and shotguns;
 Leading this pubescent mind to the wrong dime.
 Thinking music, weed, and money was for the honey;
 Maybe it was. Maybe it last.
 Maybe all I ever needed was a smile,
 That lights up the day, that guided the way;
 Was it leading me to fall or was it gearing me to crawl?
 That smile was my muse, my whole fucking juice;
 She believed in me to make a change,
 for a fucken maid;
 Telling me God believed in me,
 No, he ain't,
 Telling me I believed in me,
 That's not fucken straight;*

*Maybe I'm gay cause I let that chick get away,
Maybe this time I will see what it takes;
To reach the kingdom with some fucken faith and
fishing bait.*

Pohutukawa.

Too bad she never got to hear this, I would've liked watching her eyes roll to these rhymes and her cheeky fucken smile laughing at my alien jokes.