

## midday on bridle path road

Gail Ingram

*March 2019*

in front of a plainclothes car  
a brown man is on his back on the ground  
scrabbling like a beetle that has been turned  
and a white male officer stands over  
the brown man, his feet, his  
hands in front of his face, in confusion, in  
supplication? his forehead smeared  
with blood from some knock,  
he shrinks from  
the officer, like a leaf shrinks from the sun  
in a burnt-out  
knocked-out city, earlier  
this week, there was a lockdown in  
the middle of a school climate strike  
as a white man ran loose  
between mosques,  
now  
the officers stand on corners, carry semi-  
automatic rifles like boys  
in a game, looking both ways, like  
this is not our city, but some place  
we happen to find ourselves,  
and we know nothing, only

this brown man is still  
fair game

## Anywhere on Earth

*for the mothers and children of Ukraine*

Gail Ingram

Round as a wave bent over the chair. Round as the egg that started it all. Round as the belly with thin white scars. Round as the pill you could have swallowed. Round as the bald sun bearing down. Round as a bomb that falls. Round as fast as legs along a path. Round as an eye of storm – the gush and swirl of waters. Round as moons on fingers in the dark. Round as a bleat escaped from the mouth. Round as the curl of a midwife's arms. Round and smooth as a stone on your breast. Boom. Boom. Boom. The Great Round Beast, our mother Earth.

## Будь-де на Землі

*Для матерів та дітей України*

Кругла, як спина, зігнута знаком питання.  
Кругла, як яйце, з якого все почалося.  
Кругла, як живіт, з тонкими білими шрамами.  
Кругла, як пігулка, щоб її проковтнути.  
Кругла, як сонце, що заходить за межі.  
Кругла, як бомба, що летить і падає.  
Кругла, як коло, по якому ходимо.  
Кругла, як зіниця ока, що бачить бурю – вихори та круговерті.  
Кругла, як місяць на твоєму пальці посеред темряви.  
Кругла, як «о», що випало з вуст.  
Кругла, як теплі обійми повітря.  
Кругла і гладка, як камінь на твоїх грудях.  
Бум.  
Бум.  
Бум.  
Великокругла та могутня наша. Земля-матір.

*Translated by Anna Foster*

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## 'Good Kiwi Lass'

*after Jordan Hamel*

Gail Ingram

And she listened when her great  
aunt from Ashburton said,  
*you should wear a corset*  
*to give you shape. You should cut your hair,*  
*those snakes can't be allowed*  
*to grow*, her father said. And she saw  
some years later what happened when  
a global president put Hillary in her place,  
scaring the voting masses with a mocked-up Medusa face,  
(a classic standard she should learn  
not to follow). But that was America  
in the future – she lived in a fair  
country, and her mother told her to get  
a good education and make good  
money, and take his name and  
make your belly round but, first,  
get the ring. She took it all in  
because she wanted the white  
dress and the fairytale  
slipper.

At the foot  
of the clean white peaks, where the air  
was still fresh, she began her climb,  
began to forget  
about cutting her golden hair,  
she sought other parts  
of herself – not her sex,  
she already knew of Dark  
Age spells and Victorian estrangement,  
cast by another mother at birth  
to carry the label 'adopted' –

so it was  
 the native herbs she fell upon  
 for her identity, the star flowers  
 on dry mosses, the crunch of  
 night snow, her hand on the slow pulse  
 of the grey-gold hills of Te Waipounamu,  
she wrote

of belly scars, chewed-off stalks and fences  
 imposed by good kiwi blokes using  
 wide-eyed wives to spread the butter.  
 When she waved her pen  
 like a wild woman holding an eel, picked up  
 from the sacred ground, her fingers curled  
 over naked skin, together  
 with her wahine half-sister,  
 she had found. She was going up  
 with a backpack on, it was true,  
 but with flowers in her hair like edelweiss and  
 ngaio, *but still up*, she thought,  
 until it turned out in her middle-age skin  
 the syllables she had taken into herself

*Papatūānuku and Earth Mother*  
 had become a whisper, then a hiss, *you are*  
*old, you are invisible*, the critics cried,  
 the media cried, the white people  
 cried, *how dare you speak*  
*with a tongue made of earth*  
 until their words – *appropriation!*  
*screeching! Banshee!*  
 became snakes in the mirror  
 and their pink mouths foamed  
 with milk.

Then, at last,  
 she knew this *was* her place,  
 not here, nor  
 there, she should have cut  
 her hair, fell into  
 the background

hills, stayed invisible as  
her tuahine, invisible  
as the next lass, *invisible*  
as they had been saying  
for the last two thousand years.