

Luke Fischer

## A Gamble for my Daughter

In spite of our faults, we aim to shape  
an intimate world around you  
where kindness is ubiquitous and  
it's natural to show wonder and love  
for the lives of birds, cats, fish  
ants and spiders, for the face of the moon  
in her 'ring a rosie' through the sky, for patterns  
and colours of leaves, flowers, moss, gifts of fruit;  
where voices of crows, paperbarks, rivers  
weave into our dances, rhymes and songs  
and every glance invites an encounter,  
a hello or goodbye, good morning or goodnight  
to the sun and stars, to the mists and mulch,  
to the gnome under a fern in our neighbour's garden.

'Realists' would call it staged, a smiling mask  
that belies the grimacing face of the world,  
but we aim to hold up a mirror  
to your mind, your inborn morality,  
build an abode in which it is  
clarified, recognised, confirmed.  
In a rainbow temple—  
with frescoes painted  
from picture books—  
we realise a morality play.

We know too well that dark cracks  
will divide the golden figures,  
the makeshift walls will tumble,  
that like a panther  
the world's darkness, deceit, brutality

will creep into your cubby house,  
alarm your dolls, that at first  
you will disbelieve the evidence  
of evil.

Progressive awakenings will follow  
(perhaps at eight, twelve, seventeen, twenty-seven):  
when you learn how creatures in your family of soft toys—  
animated in your play that turned the living room  
into jungle or ocean, the timber floor into a desert plain—  
have since been extinguished by humans  
from the wild—now make-believe as pegasi,  
solely preserved as stuffed specimens;  
when you study histories of racism,  
slavery, exploitation; comprehend  
systems that underpin imperialism,  
genocide, geopolitics, corporate empire.  
Where once you trod on even ground  
the earth will tremor, your world split  
in two, unbridgeable chasms will separate  
what *is* from what *ought* to be.

The temple will come to resemble  
a dream, a never-executed architectural plan,  
where it once seemed to stand, the site of a bombed church:  
decapitated, jagged spires of charcoal stone, rubble, bell-fragments,  
shards of colour grimed with ash and dirt.

You will have to endure the antinomy  
between the flame of platonic truth  
and the dark reality. It will feel  
like a cyclone is pulling you apart.

In the eye of the storm  
three options will crystallise:  
compromise, complicity, the choice

to survive as a shade; accedence  
to powerlessness, the futility  
of any action, the choice to plunge  
into the abyss; or summoning  
the strength to bear a soaring flame,  
to carry the torch even into Hades—  
this world's proper name.

As both the first and second are death  
the third is our gamble and prayer.

'A Gamble for my Daughter' was previously published in *A Gamble for my Daughter* by Luke Fischer (Marrickville, NSW: Vagabond Press, 2022).