

## Because it's not about the oranges

### Water babies

I was a water baby, like those in fairy tales.  
Thank you, Mr. Kingsley. Today they swim  
in our universal imagination — *came complete*  
*with fins and gills*, my mother used to say of me.

Any body of water lapped for mine. Bath time  
washed into ponds, creeks, rivers, estuaries —  
oceans. I believed in buoyancy. Between waves  
and I — a deep green silence borne of easy salt.

And sunlit surfaces. I felt clean — whole. Holy  
myself in the water, couldn't imagine living far  
from the beach. Was never too cold. Too lazy.  
Or too consumed to plunge in. But change —

thrummed through me. For a decade I looked on.  
From the brink. Shrank from droplets. Rivulets.  
Blamed temperature and timing. My blow wave.  
But I couldn't fathom this turbulence —

this aversion. Apart from tears, I keeled towards  
the dry. As if coated again in vernix. As if there  
was some thick fragility I was pressed to preserve.  
To coat myself in. I knew I had drowned —

an essential early outline. The picture refracted —  
I could not discern the blur. Couldn't even test —  
with a toe. I wanted — waves. I watched. My kids  
on their surfboards. A son stepped out —

to invite me in. Wouldn't take no. Took my hand  
instead. Held on until I stood knee deep —  
then he let me go. And I've not looked back.  
Loving immersion. My son. My water baby.

## **Because it's not about the oranges**

There were no oranges

in the house. Not in the fridge nor the fruit bowl. A wifely neglect. He likes his morning juice — precious little over which we preside. So, I drove directly to the fruit shop for nine kilos of the orangest oranges in unwieldy red net bags. I lugged

them from car to kitchen. Set them rolling across the benchtop — a fragrant orange irrelevance. They filled five pots, four pans. Still more crammed the fruit drawer — pock-marked and pith-filled. An orange onslaught that had little, or nothing to do

with orange sunrise. Because it's not about the oranges.

## Ice cream

I'd promised them ice cream, from Augustus, the new gelateria in town —  
in that narrow window, after dinner and just before closing,  
from a shiny silver scoop. But we were caught

in the blue light, which slashed through the car. Tore at our contented dark.  
I pulled over. The kids slumped into silence. Only our kelpie  
surged, snarled so that it was hard to hear

the policeman grunt. He squeezed his big blue head in at the driver's side,  
and slurred the fine print. I breathed — into the sterile  
contraption. Unfurled my tongue for a saliva

scrape. And dredged up my license. All clear — but for the outstanding rego  
and the UVP I couldn't pay. Costly to leave. Newly single,  
I only had an ex-credit card and several children

in tow. But Big Blue wasn't disarmed by extenuating circumstances. DV  
fell beyond his boots, careened past traffic controls, dodged  
his department. I asked to step out for air,

and for the sake of ears. Such small sets. He was sorry that he couldn't let us  
go. I was sorry too — that he'd have to stay. Supervise  
our staying put. An impasse. He paced.

Rocked on his dull heels and muttered to the road. I threw open four car doors.  
*Faster to walk for ice cream* I told the kids. A rush. A release.  
They scampered. I crumpled kerbside,

informed my new blue shadow of the protracted lull, the idling. Off-duty —  
we both were. The faded frenzy — and inaction. Familiar —  
the form. Always left to melt. Refreeze.

2/10

Last year, I dated a guy who I slept with once or twice, perhaps. The sex was good but the experience overall ruined, for me at least, by his ensuing behaviour — the cryptic follow-up texts,

the connection full of static. When I vocalised my discontent,

he was unapologetic — even requested a *rating* as if the sex was an uber ride or a meal ranked on *Trip Advisor*. I balked. Refused. But he persisted in nagging despite my warning of an unsatisfactory

result. And when he received that titular score, that he'd wrung

from me, he tried to argue. As though I'd make adjustments out of deepest contemplation, consternation or mercy. He said he'd never ever before been scored so low. He also said he'd never before asked.

## Deceit

The elderly vet passes through the tearoom  
while us nurses are on lunch break.

But he stops. Abrupt in the doorway.  
Considers me with narrowed eyes.

*Do I see you writing poetry there?*  
obviously surprised. And not a little put out.

Yes, I offer. An exaggerated smile.  
*And sometimes even my colleagues feature.*

*You have most certainly deceived us here,*  
he declares. Makes to saunter away.

But I am enjoying myself far too much —  
to let him disengage. I request his

extrapolation. Then watch his face cave  
in, as it often does when our conversations

becomes too formless for him to captain.  
But being merciful — I let him go.

## **Dust and Butterflies**

Mid-morning Monday, and it's already hot – for Autumn. The road unpaved. A new lover up in that general direction. A rural property beyond Ballan. A new row of expectations or hopes. Scenic views at the least. I am alone in my big car on an empty narrow road winding to somewhere, or nowhere of significance. To someone that will or will not reach me — this season or next. The trees on either side lift and lean to brush fronds, so that the ground I roll over is a kinetic patchwork of light and shade that blinks like dozens of tiny forest eyes, and the dust and debris billows in ditches, until I look again and again as I drive, and I see that the whirling leaves and bits of bark are in fact butterflies, entire colonies, russet clouds at every juncture of that road. More life than leaves. Not blown by the motion of my car. But flying as I drive on by. A synchronicity that rushes on and on to gear me down — an internal stop while I speed. That enclave — dust and butterflies. And for the longest stretch, arrival doesn't matter.