

Arrival

The dawn is flame-coloured. Where I have slept,
under trees, my indent still presses on the ground. I lean
into wakefulness, drawn above the mesh of the night:
the leaf falling, the child saying my name, the cobweb
stretched on my cheekbone. In the loose soil
my footprint stays without me, woven into the scent
of the morning. Wind trips through its coils of swell.
At my side, a black-backed beetle probes the leaf
that has fallen, shifting it with its hooked hands, a self-
styled flag. I gaze and so much blooms and spills
though it's I who emerges. Two wrens. So close
I can hold, with my lungs, their sheer hearts, their blue-
splashed heads. Where they flit, my fingers slide
into the yellow grass, and the white rims of the dew's
strung spheres cling to me, their clean, clear weight
lifting as I move, their suck dissolving into air
with that slow, slow levitation. Drifts of cloud
in the leaves of peeling gums, white on the white
trunks, feed on the dew's tide, lingering as it rises.
The child grows still, staring where her father's hand
gestures at a curving branch. Head-swivel of an owl. I lean.
Into the time I have. Wingbeats. Atoms of air. Soil
and tree-bark. A girl's pulse in the browns, the greens,
the yawning blues of a sky-dazzled land. The day rolls,
the world tumbles through me. In the wave of its momentum.

Rune

Blue-grey stone jags up from the foothills,
looming into cliffs and crags, white-capped
in a wind which renders the man, like the pale
grass and the small, ground-hugging shrubs,
horizontal, clinging under a clamour of sky.
Ripped cloud thickens into a mesh of snow. Ice
seeps into his fingers. And the sharp whip
on the wind-entangled tarn carves into his bones
a kind of filigree, wiry strands of the weather
curling into his marrow, planting squalls
in the re-spelling of his name.

Oxygen

In the sleuth's book of the atmosphere oxygen doesn't appear for the first few hundred pages, two billion years from the Earth's beginning. It's a minor player, point-three percent or less of the air. But it's rising and by the Late Palaeozoic, it's peaked at thirty-five, igniting even the wetlands, firestorms we've never nightmared. As the dinosaurs start to emerge it drops again – fifteen percent and the wildfires won't spread. A fire famine. Then it's creeping. Cretaceous and it curves into thirty, thirty-one. And with us? Twenty-point-nine-five – toasties round the campfire, the gas in our lungs.

The autotrophs breathing it out, the greens, reds and blacks, the yellows and blues, the purples of cyanobacteria, have soaked in the sun ten thousand times longer than we have.

We should build a monument. To the conjurers, purveyors of oxygen, the worst of their hellish blooms, toxic as ourselves, reminding us nothing is virtuous. The plants, early on, borrowed them, copied them. Our small inhales of their yield tacking us to the universe.

Nourished by their kind, our vision extends now
for aeons: the Earth just forming, the impact
that makes the moon, the slow inter-ravelling –
single-cell affinities, multi-celled, extinctions,
flourishings. We expand our gaze. History
revealing time as the tied-together sprawl of a vast
mathematical dance. The Earth. Middle aged now.
Still wheeling. The tight glint of ourselves
across the play of it. Our own whirling rhythms
in the blistering spin of the hour.

Self-portrait in the Blue Mountains

At the lookout, a slim gap between the fence
built by the Council and the rock built
by lava-surge and aeons of weather
has been scraped by the shirts, jumpers,
chest of a thousand hearts. It wakes us, it seems,
to tilt on the steep side of such borders,
to feel in our foot soles, in our hips, our fingers,
in the ticking of our veins, this small escape,
sharpened by vertigo, confounded by the weight
of rock, under the warning, 'Do not
pass'. On the wrong side, the trespassers have all
sat and watched and listened, this long way up,
the track below a hairline in a dusting of shrubs,
or trees, we cannot tell, a voice floating out
like a memory of water to remind us
we should not throw stones.

The cliff is sheer. And the fallen rocks
are car-sized, house-sized. I lie at the edge
in the sun, as near, for a moment,
to the weather as the rock itself.

The rising

Losing depth, the night's
tissue tears against the horizon,
trailing into the west with the soft
skin-sound of its vanishing –
again, the day arrives,
the sulphur roar of the sun
hurling us its explosions,
the thin blue of the Earth
feeding our lungs,
the first slip
of our hours
already behind us.

Origami with sunset

Fold corner A to corner C,
the glow of the sun's fusion
to the blue's
deepening haze, fold again,
D to B, and across, pull
and fold, and turn
until the wings, just
here, begin to emerge,
tug
gently, the burning
sun, the unrolling night
in the tips
of your fingers.

A small child finds a ladybird

Her squat-bodied
walk
crumbles under her –
she is all
at the tip
of her finger,
a red
and black-spotted
fall
into the crux
of the day. She is
bug-eyed. We
are behind her,
wanting even
half
of her gaze.

Wading with horseshoe crabs

By the time the land takes a form we would recognise, plates rubbing apart, oceans more or less where our maps would place them, there are no sapiens anywhere. Already there are spiders – four hundred million years of occupation. Beside them: diatoms, turtles and sea jellies. Bristleworms and sundews. Skinks and ants and... not ourselves. Not nearly.

There are butterflies. Bandicoots and geckos. Eucalypts. Wood moths and quolls. And when humans do emerge, we're inside the entanglement. Earth-lines in every cell. We traipse across the world, casting names for what we find, weaving them into our tales, squabbling over this or this inflection. And still it holds, the force of it.

In every leaf, each moss-covered stone, every egg-laden pool, wombat, shark, each gull. Billions of years old and whole planets bare of it. We were never alone. So much pushed to the point of falling now, rising in our sea of selves, our weight crushing the wilds. Not deaf to it. Never, but by our own tongues. And not all of us. Can we learn again the steps for being here. In the blue/green. In the weather and the bird calls. In the madness. In the tremor.

In waves

The expression – the drag of it on her bones –
has slipped again, third time since breakfast,
leaking recoil and snot and crow lines
into the face she wears.

It takes minutes to tuck it back
into the glance she knows she needs
to carry on. In the news: Arctic fires.

Has she heard it right?

She imagines all of us – the double mask.

All of us – on our skin's other side,
the wide-mouthed, weeping horror,
as if we are one. She tucks it in.

Like a trick of mirrors. She can feel
how it seeps into her breathing – ice
on fire, the smoke in her lungs.