# Refraction

David Ralph Lewis

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### **Surface Tension**

Between worlds the shine of the sea, the light that marks the dividing line between our world and our neighbours.

We see reflections of what we could be our limbs rippling, our throats opening our eyes wide and dark, our skin slick like oil. The salt crusting over our lips, over our bare shoulder blades which almost poke through the skin, sodium crystals becoming scales. Our laughter now visible, rebounding off submerged landmasses.

How we, stranded above, long to let the glimmer into our lungs, breathe in the perfection of each gentle wave.

We skim the surface of that blinding mirror with cupped hands, searching for entry. Clouds gather, bear witness. Our parallel selves fade into foam.

#### Warm up

'Its been a while,' the water whispers as I enter, inch by inch, 'but what's a few million years between friends? I know why you abandoned me for land. I forgive you.'

Every part of my body is held so tenderly as I submerge my head, the cold slowing all anxieties. I realise I have always been a wave, never the same from one moment to the next, always dissolving into surf. I watch my worries float away, turn to ripples.

I kick forward, make the first stroke. The water murmurs 'Welcome home.'

#### What the water says (part 1)

I do not care for your status signifiers, your adornments of precious rocks, your cardboard crowns. Remove them all before you swim. I will accept all your bodies equally as tithes. I am older and stranger than your imagination, more powerful than all your fragile metal weapons combined.

Look no further than the light, born from eternal explosions, thrown across one hundred and fifty million kilometres. The fastest known particle (and wave) in the universe- yet I can simply absorb it, bend it at new angles, command it to vibrate for me over buried beds. You will never understand those sweet songs the sunlight sings down at the depths, only for me.

#### Length 12

I relax into the familiar descent, releasing pressure and worries from my mouth in gentle bubbles.

The world is a party next door. Muffled beats, barely understood voices drift down together on broken sunbeams.

The cold is a friend long forgotten. Weeds tug at my ankles, welcome back.

If you listen closely, there is music, even here. The light pulses to it.

## Length 137

I don't remember when my gills grew, when water stopped being threatening, when it became my sanctuary.

All I know is I breathe a lung full of blue algae, find it pleasant. Preferable to air. Hands grow webbing,

feet become fins. Just below the surface I linger, listening to muffled voices far above in a life I left behind.

On each length, I glide forward, towards a destination I can't name but feel with each aching muscle.

With each stroke, I grow closer to understanding flickering patterns, messages around my slight shadow.

#### What the surface voices say

It's time we scrubbed this sinkhole clean. Rip out the weeds that drag children down. It's unhygienic to keep this water standing. We need to enclose this dream-filled sky under a secure roof, Turn uneven banks to straight lines. Plant ceramic tiles. Wait for germination. These loitering mermaidsa nuisance! Choke their lungs with clarifying chlorine. We will build a temple just for us, light as our altar, where only we will worship.

There, we will capture all the sunbeams that dance over the shallows and become forgotten. This is our gift to the future.

## Length 6,238,903

another breath

surface lost

new darkness

where is light?

unfamiliar patterns flicker chemicals remixed

> sudden plastic sting

no jellyfish only

shopping bags

floating on currents

sudden stench of bleach and

electricity

map to the border

smudged incoherent

which way is up?

ripples of shock

## staccato faces loom

so much sudden chatter

so much shouting when

once only birdsong

water no longer cold

but warm

like bodies

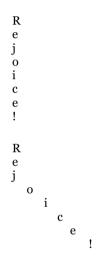
#### What the water says (part 2)

You think yourselves cleveryou are mistaken. This planet is not yours. It belongs to me. For eternity I have been swirling, whispering, churning. You cling to rocks, only because I allow it. Tread carefully, frail dreamers, I created you, years ago, deep in the darkness, in warm jets. If I choose to surge on a whim, your precious cities will return, accepted back to lapping foam.

## **Cool down**

I arrive, the first fish exiled for exploration, scrubbed and iridescent. A sky full of a hundred suns in straight strips, voices loud and distant. Surfaces shiny strange. The absence of trees. No grass, no mud. Peeled and exposed, blistering and burning. I gasp for breath, mouth opening and closing, desperate for oxygen, finding chlorine fumes.

# What the sunbeams sing



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## About the author

David Ralph Lewis is a poet and short story writer based in Bristol, UK who has been published in *Marble Poetry, Mineral Lit* magazine and *Nine Muses Poetry*. When not writing, he enjoys dancing badly at gigs and attempting to grow vegetables.

His first poetry chapbook, *Our Voices in the Chaos*, was published by *Selcouth Station* in October 2019.

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