

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 mermaids-
a 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 clever-
you 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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