

Ship's Cove

This is the start.

The teenage boys strip to shriek
and dip in the azure blue.

I could have said basil or dill
because the water keeps changing.

The start is a cove of lost things
the things I don't know
such as whether Captain Cook and navigator Tupaia
breathing in the good clean air
saw a rainbow or this exact pebble.

I stop on the stones
the storm names ochre mustard tangerine
because the hairs on my arm
stand on end and my breath links
this breath to the next breath
and the next and the next
and the next across centuries until
I am breathing upon the ship.

He said he said
will you stay?
He meant he meant
pray for good winds.

School House Bay

I am wearing poetry
like an overcoat. No, a thermal singlet.
I am wearing the wind off the uppity
waves and the green leaves that skim
and the black-barked beech
and the cobbled light.

You can't see the poem.
I can see the new generation bush
and a single fantail that flits
like a dandelion wish.

My thermal singlet is heavy with ghosts.
It is only the start.
I am picnicking in the thought
of a young girl and her skipping rope.
She looks through the high window.
She draws a tōtara with her sharp pencil.
The grey sky is out of reach.

Does she know the Queens of England?
Does she wear a velvet dress to match the inkwell?
Does she hear the raucous tūi?
Can she pick Istanbul on a map and draw a rectangle?

The porthole slams shut in the wind.

Resolution Bay

I will keep burgundy leaf.
I will keep the peak of a hill.
I will keep ostrich and lemon-curd stones.
I will keep walking.

But that is later in the chill of the storm.
The day's brightness screams
of utter beauty.
It hurts to look.
I can't stop looking.

If I put beauty in a poem
trees sky track
will you see it
and almost stop breathing?

Like when I was breathless young
not wanting to wake anyone
waiting for first light.

Counting Cities

Amsterdam and nectarine drips juice in the rain
my distant daughters walk arm-in-arm with my
phantom tramping crew Barcelona beckons to where I sit
in the sun outside and older Cairo so complicated in books any
city's a thicket erratic it's a given my bag a gape tea
for two scones perhaps maybe dive into delicious Dublin now there's
a city I was a child with coloured pencils and apple trees
emblems of Edinburgh now I am writing with feet
rather than fat sticky crayons the fizz of Fez an explosion
of anecdote the softer carpet behind my grandmother's
Glasgow a tuft of hair blocking the tree Honolulu for Anne
up and up the hill a demon when I need to float feet
off the ground Istanbul for dear Banu and a larder poem
from Michele and Emma Jerusalem artichokes or
the cookbook and I'm off to a gust of poets Kathmandu
from head to toe extra good socks stop the blisters but on
goes the twang and ache London's my twenties and it's
the eighties the right move Madrid a gap shriek short steps
little slip ten nights in New York and still the black beetle scurries
even in the wet not Oslo but French cheeses crisp baguette
tongue-tied in Paris demon rain lemon showers which
day sticks what to pick Quebec City out of range
eager to please can't swallow speak love Rome amo la città
ha! my Italian cul-de-sac to fill with fronds and espresso Sydney
familiar Shanghai a dream tug and I'm back in the gondola
photographed Tokyo first foreign city going round round

on the Yamanote Line and a hula hoop at seven or Urmia
think of Persian women writing poems boating watery
Venice a jig in the streets the Warsaw of fiction Xiamen Square
in China weep and put the lid on the teapot green steaming
have carried a flask old York still drinking tea midstream walking

a slew, a pebble and a poem to hold

Counting Colours

Amber ash grey can barely count count nothing two three count watermelon
seeds blue black burnt umber I am under burnt sienna no throat to cry charcoal
cobalt blue cadmium red but still the world is storm my eye
on the track over nine hours snail's pace best way to travel dandelion deep
blue dark blue I am zealous for blue would emerald appeal
maybe a Beckett bauble babble in my ear noisy with talk I am tapering off
not babble of wind nor bauble of rain me yabbering stutter flax fluorescent
yellow would be a pin in the eye a pin on the map a cab to Trafalgar Square
ha! green I see a dab of green it's gone viral here in the storm smashed bush
Hollywood cerise and an elaborate con with smacks twists indigo
my fat ankle jade if not blue why not khaki and I am landing at Gatwick
London mist dressed in a lime skirt my hatbox jammed with hats what else
my favourites mint green mauve not mustard in fact it's all surreal
flashes of Ladbrook Grove drinking English ale flick navy blue school uniform
pleated measured above the knee and my clicking shoes a second-hand
jackpot olive orange my first-aid kit fails the ice sachet ruined the tape wet
purple plum and I am at Little Sister a plum tart tasty reading midstream Dante
it's in Italian singing the rhyme quartz footpath and anchor then it's nil
by mouth red ruby Ruby Bay the stony beach a diversion from ouch
shocking pink saffron slate grey and all I can do is count two three
pound a long-form poem into the mud slush track and hear the athletic
tan turquoise I rhyme tangerine squelch felt listen to sweet roundabout
of pain ultramarine is right there behind the grey sky think of that
I will scout behind the tree the cloud the rain blue my pain before
slate violet vermilion my little paint set a honey on wash and line

and I picture a towel wiping legs cheeks dead on my feet white
luxuriant soft to touch xanthic undoubtedly won't stop now
throw into the air yellow vowels sweet zucchini roasted on the grill
sizzles on my tongue with garlic chilli garden freshness

a silence, a rage and words break apart