

Lizards

They shun company, preferring the dark
where they keep their sticky hands to themselves.

Except on Saturdays
when they have foam parties by the sink.

Skinny dip in dishwater
and drink cocktails laced with fairy liquid.

The more active ride surf on chopsticks
and marvel at their balance.

Others prefer the toaster
find new methods to scale the grills
or rest easy on the crumb tray.

A fool's game. Even the cold blooded burn.

Some choose to shoot the breeze
on the ceiling fan. Stopping off for a quick one behind a mirror
or picture frame. She with the rubber band or paper clip
in her mouth promises a night of thigh locks
and Shibari.

At light, the good-time boy, forgotten, abandoned

without his speedos, freezes at the sound of footsteps.

Panicked he pretends to play dead – which works

until he hears the cry “chee chak” “chee chak.”

Game over, he speeds away without his tail between his legs.

My Grandmother's well

Even after they fixed a sink

she used the well.

I can see the moon look back at me, she said.

When I drop my bucket I hear it call.

In monsoon season I can hear the sound of drains,

can your taps do that?

I was afraid of her well, afraid

to see my ancestors in the ripples

to fall without stopping

to hear high-pitched voices echo.

When she died they covered the well

with five wooden planks.

And at New Year when visitors came

they put flowers on top.

Motherhood intervened

For ten hours I'm hooked to oxytocin, a spinal tap in my back. My legs spread ready to push but I can't, and she has to cut a smile where the muscle is thin and won't easily tear.

No wailing

I can't do it –

Or yelling

Give me gas –

Only silent chambers of bottle brushes, bobbled hats, knitted boots and cotton caps. Dreams of strolls past park benches beneath shaded trees and picking pebbles on moist sands in the breeze.

As I sleep, they unfurl, uncurl and clamp your cord, our connection severed. They hold you and wipe my blood from your eyes. My weight, seven pounds lighter. When I awake you are by my side, an unexpected guest, wrapped in fleece, limbs stained with traces of blue. I see wisps of hair on your head – mine, and long hands – his.

And when you cry, I look for someone to carry your fragile skull barely hinged to your body. But there is only me, and my untrained hands.

Purple Orchids

Ceramic or plastic, moth orchids are unhappy
in flower pots. Their curved stems lean over,
clinging, desperate to share intimate secrets.
In cut glass vases they sigh and whisper “do you love me?”

On altar tables, Dendrobiums expect respect and get it.
They pray for the sick and divine lottery numbers.
In moments of silence they remember the dead,
and bow to the empty chairs where they used to sit.

If invited to a cocktail, Vanda Orchids give out name cards
embossed with print. Back straight, they scan the room
looking for green olives stuffed with pimentos. They smile
at no one in particular, hoping no one notices their spots.

In crushed silk, lady slipper orchids finger their pearls
and think of shopping trips in Milan. They twirl gluten-free
linguine on forks with ivory handles and slurp when no
one is looking. Listening to Delibes, shades drawn
they cry into their lace pillows.

In Singapore, Vanda “Miss Joaquim” cuts ribbons
and gives talks on active ageing. She blushes
when applause is too loud and counts celebrities
among her friends. She refuses talk shows, unwilling
to discuss her complicated conception. Vanda is her
cousin. They text but seldom talk.

Unborn

On the screen you are smudged
more black than white, a mollusc

without shell or limbs, spoiled
spine floating in a shared ocean.

there is no heartbeat

sorry

Curled beside your cot I lie empty, full
of you in my stomach. My breasts

inflare imagining the pull
and fit of your mouth, weeping

you will never know the colours of crayons
or the sound of pasta bowties in a jar.

And on your birthday, the day
you weren't born, I count

the candles on your cake;
make your whispered wishes mine.

At night I dream of you behind a brick wall.
My nails scrape at the mortar

thickened with dried blood, as I chase
your cry. A gypsy moth following the wind.

The Dream

The first time I met him it was at lunch
and like my husband he was tall
and had quiet ways. And after dessert
didn't his brother come out in his chef hat
to top up our glasses and drink up
our compliments. And we laughed
because we had the same
granite tops and light dimmer switches.

Weren't we living the dream.

Didn't we say this is how it was going to be
at fourteen when we peeled rambutans
on your wrought-iron swing
and promised to write in blue aerogrammes
of each fumble
and lip clash in the dark.

Didn't we both have sons
and stay at home to change nappies
and watch Days of Our Lives

while our peers learnt
power point and packed
salads in their lunchboxes.

If I had told you his eyes held still when you smiled
If I had told you, he looked the other way when you spoke
If I had told you when you rested your arm on his back
he didn't lean in –

And after fifteen years
when he said, *it's over*,
didn't we stalk her on facebook
and laugh at the roots of her dyed blonde bob.
Didn't we carve his name on a watermelon and kick
the shit out of it, scooping the flesh to eat.
Didn't we drive to the sea and use cables to jump start your heart.

And because they are both tall and have quiet ways
when I lie on my husband's chest I count
his single curls and listen for unfamiliar names called out
in his sleep. And in the morning
after I turn out his pockets, I get on my knees to pray.

Then and Now

Once, we shared shoes
and danced in open-air pavilions.
Now we share orthopedic insoles
and sway to nothing in particular. We like
to go on facebook and search
ex-friends, ex-boyfriends, ex-
anything, wanting to remember
the colour of our hair
and the sound of zips closing easily.

We found meaning
in the nonsensical
and smoked under street lights
without feeling cold.
Found comfort in the prickly hair
of an unfamiliar limb
or the scent
of an unwashed neck. *Do you remember
when Adam pissed in his beer glass and drank it?
And wasn't he sent to A&E*

*to have his stomach pumped? And didn't his girlfriend
insist he eat extra strong mints before kissing?*

The stories spill around the table
in tall glasses of Prosecco
and bookend between the Halloumi and Cambozola
names we once mistook
for Italian fishing villages.

At first light, drinks in hand,
and barefoot, we rub lavender dew
between our toes. *I haven't stayed up this early
since breastfeeding.*

We imagine our bodies as our own, free
to push and pull, add weight, make lighter
as we warble in hushed tones to the chorus of the Wood Pigeon.

Better Vision

On Monday I bring my ophthalmologist
a basket of unopened letters, empty
picture frames, and half-eaten Viennese whirls.

Let me see, he says, and slides his stethoscope
on to the inside of my thigh and listens
for the click in my hip. *Which is clearer*

the red or the green? I imagine cupolas
the colour of the sea
and the doctor in his white coat

wearing a panama hat. In meadows
of yellow daisies, we lunch
on lace napkins and eat souvlaki

using scalpels, careful not to bruise the fava beans.

Although the night sky is more visible, I struggle
to trace the craters on the moon. *Come back*

next week, he says, *I'll examine*

the back of your retina. I ask him why

all white lines are curved.

He applies eye drops, hides breadsticks

behind his back, and asks *how many?* “Four,” I say.

I think you have an astigmatism.