

In the beginning I thought I was looking for my father. But it turns out I was looking for yours. In the dark green fields of the north of England. In the throbbing pink flesh of my failing heart. Stretched to the limit. I thought I was looking for my father. But now all I feel is yours.

I did not bother to check the ocean floor for upturned rocks. I did not think at the time that your grief was my grief. That your life was my life. That I could be of any assistance whatsoever in filling the absence of your loss. I did not think to sweep my heart with the currents of his life. I did not think you might still feel the salt in his hair. Late at night where you lie warm and pulsing in my arms. I did not see how all of this was growing inside me. Because I was looking for my father. And yours was already gone.

As blooms of rising damp scale the walls of his small bathroom. My father and I. And seep into the lounge where his television plays in the dark. The air is full of blue and white. Flecks of iridescent dancing light in the sweet haze of his home-made cigarette. A symphony of under-stated self-fulfilling neglect. He gets up from his chair and I can see the body he has left behind. Momentarily, to make another coffee. And then back to the safe upholstery of his refrain. Secreting all the little things we cannot say because we don't know what to say. Because we are afraid. And all the things you could not say because of that day. When the ocean swallowed your father. Whole. Knitting his gentle organs into coral reef.

Back home, the giant kelp writhes in the depths of the Tasman sea. He could have chosen that place. But I guess this is where he knew you would be. We're moving forward on a corrugated road when you recognise his eyes in the trees. In the place where a copse of silver birch sheds skin upon skin. Your dad. It has to be. The mottled forest kisses him in slippery gills. And the car we are travelling in does not stop in time for you to ask him where he's been. For seventeen years adrift. At sea. And first it is you who cannot breathe. And then it is I who cannot breathe. The distance between the car and the verge and the ground and the sun and the broken tree which holds him motionless in this blue. Amphibious weight. A tidal rip cleaves you back into his glory plume. And me, to the sorrow of your Great Barrier Reef. I meet the crabs and the barnacles and the water fleas. Unleash from that day the most spectacular metamorphoses from free-swimming plankton to reef-dwelling father-lost-at-sea.

All our insides are on the outsides. Trailing. Trawling. Hundreds of metres cast from the window on your side of the car. Knotted and tangled they fall away in messy clumps of something once remembered so clean. I put my hand on your knee desperate to anchor this spectacular moment in more than the rivulets of petrified dirt beneath our wheels. Could ever begin to afford. To replenish all the things relentless summer rains have washed away. But the speed of this extrapolated body catches us both on the run. How badly I want to catch a glimpse. Of your dad looking out from his silvery ocean hide. To trace the gentle tufts of his eyes with mine. To squeeze into him these years of missing touch. My father not yours. To let him feel. This mass of invertebrate life between us.