

Selected Poems

Greta Kerr

Home

During the day
the body, composed like music,
says to itself:
“How are you?”
To which the immediate response is:
“In love,”
sighing like a song about it,
before splashing cold water
out of porcelain basin on purple veined skin.
There are many ways to love,
and to destroy yourself,
I'd list them all but you would only remember two:
Talk about sadness,
and solitude,
as if they were art
and when the dotted line asks for 'Name,'
tell yourself you are much too shy
to write mine instead.
Substitute this
with telling the neighbours
that the type of passion they're thinking of
wasn't made -
we were just trying to touch each other's faces.
Tell yourself:
I'm never truly here,
parts of me exist everywhere,
parts of the body hum
like music
and we're drowning at the bottom of a bath

Bach's Suite for Cello Solo No. 1 in G
playing from another room.

A Prayer for the Insomniacs

Apparently, there is a point at which
you can sleep for so many hours
that your body begins to fold back in on itself,
and become tired all over again.

I was told this yesterday, and asked to limit my sleep
to 10 hours, and only at night time,
but I couldn't understand why my body would betray me like this,
or why it was such a problem.

I'm telling myself
Don't close your eyes
in the middle of the god damn day,
and of course I feel like an idiot.
I am an adult now, after all,
why do I have to keep my door wide open all night,
or shut the blinds to keep the daylight out?
I'm telling myself over and over:
when your day ends,
someone else's begins,
but the sun is so arrogant
and won't leave me alone.

You have to understand
that these things don't come naturally to me -
they take their time,
like pulling out of a driveway,
or entering a room while someone you love is sleeping.

I'm trying to stay awake so desperately
I begin reciting things to myself
I know to be true, like how
90 per cent of sea turtle hatchlings will die
as they make their way from their nest to the sea.
I recall how I read somewhere
that as a sea turtle builds its nest,
its tear glands leak
because the air is so dry that it *hurts*,

and I wonder if it's crying to give a little
of what it means to be home,
or maybe it's crying because the mother knows
that only 10 of her eggs will survive,

while 90 will die.
She has to know,
in the same way I know how you write the word
LOVE
and that your W's look like E's,
though I search the letter you gave me all the same.

Now I'm walking into my home
and turning on all the lights in the house,
because like a child
I can only be scared of what I can't see,
but the only thing I am sure of knowing
is that if a hundred sea turtles emerged from their nests,
they would now begin to crawl the 200 or so metres to the sea,
where they would be safe.

I'm telling myself *10 hours*
as I think of how at this moment seabirds would spot the newborn turtles
and start circling overhead,
their eyes locked on the hatchlings
as if they are old lovers at a party,
and though the hatchlings would try to move fast enough,
the sand would collapse underneath them,
and the seabirds would swoop down so easily,
too easily,
and hold the hatchlings in their beaks
whilst they rip open their soft flesh.

My family is arriving home and they call out to me,
but I can't answer because I am thinking about how
the babies would call to their mother,
but she would have no idea,
she wouldn't be there,
and maybe the babies would still try sprinting across the sand,
but they are so small,
and the stretch of sand is so big,
so some of them would simply
stop
and the vultures would pick off the hatchlings one by one,
and it's completely silent,
and no one knows this is happening,
except I am thinking about it as I make my bed,
and praying to God I don't fall asleep yet.

I know that by now,

most of the hatchlings would have been torn apart.
Their delicate bodies are like newborns, strangers to the world,
now so soft, torn away like tissue paper.
And the vultures,
being Masters of life and death,
are hardly satisfied.
The turtles that would have made it to the ocean
are being tossed back and forth by the incoming waves,
and only now would they realise they're completely
and entirely alone.

I'm telling myself this story
over and over again,
and just as I think I've forgotten to turn off all the lights in the house,
my Mother comes home
and she says
I love you, I love you

and I think of how sea turtles
can swim three thousand feet below the ocean's surface,
how when the time comes for the hatchlings to lay their own eggs,
they return to the same beach that they were born,
no matter how far they have swum away.
And I am watching the clock
and suddenly I realise
I've stayed awake all night.