

SAMPLER

Kelptown

Also by Carol Watts

When Blue Light Falls (Shearsman Books, 2018)

Dockfield (Equipage, 2017)

56, a poem sequence (with George Szirtes, Arc Publications, 2016)

Many Weathers Wildly Comes (Spiralbound/Susakpress, 2015)

Flete, artist's book (2014)

Sundog (Veer Books, 2013)

Mother Blake (Equipage, 2012)

Occasionals (Reality Street Editions, 2011)

this is red (Torque Press, 2009)

Wrack (Reality Street Editions, 2007)

brass, running (Equipage, 2006)

alphabetise, artist's book (2005)

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Carol Watts

Kelptown

SAMPLE

First published in the United Kingdom in 2020 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
PO Box 4239
Swindon
SN3 9FN

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-733-9

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the poetry from this collection has been previously published in
Cordite Poetry Review, *Datafeed*, *Dusie*, *electric wood spectra*, *The Goose*,
Tentacular, *This Corner* and *Trude magazine*. I've included acknowledgements
and other connected materials in the notes. Heartfelt thanks to all the editors.

Particular warm thanks are due to friends: Lisa Samuels, for the kauris that
made me see my own shores; Dave Maric, for our collaboration in 2016 which
resulted in his work, *Vigil*; and especially Will Montgomery, for what has been
a transformative exchange in making work over a number of years, and for
reminding me of Marianne Moore's 'The Fish' as I moved to
Brighton's Kempton.

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For my sisters, with love

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Kelptown

You ask me whom the *Macrocystis* alga hugs in its arms?
Study, study it, at a certain hour, in a certain sea I know.

Pablo Neruda

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Kelptown

1

Slippery condominium, finding a foothold perilous
to a resting here, each green cell an inhabiting,
each morning a remaking of us.

How do I live, tenant amongst your long fronds.
Gathering the means to remain, my glutinous
high rise swaying, extending northward.

I saw you southern among islands, your forests
great and hospitable. Subterranean bark mimicking
striated skin of whales, breaching kauris

reverenced in terrestrial reserve, as if balance
could be struck and mean more than fortune,
more than my shaven head and a chance wind.

I saw you in a western bay, spreading sugar
under sea planes and container ships, so refuge
lay in invited anthropologies of relation

that might give me entry. None but
fantasies of attachment ballooning new galls
from my limbs as if to compensate, made

to become my own vacant property, as if
a keening of orcas might echo more resonant
from basements and kitchenettes, my studio

compression. Your real estate. So here I am
renting vegetal architecture, my body
failing in form, perverse and vainly adaptive.

I am seeking you, unsuitable for attachment.
Distribution is sporadic, but here is a home
on friable shores, built from inundate truths.

Made and remade, no stone to grip without rolling,
depositional and uncertain, no holdfast place,
yet we live here, and daily discover this.

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Unkempt we are. Sea hours catch us
 waiting, while cat-sharks strew purses
 more distantly, as if you might find

poor returns scattered in the street.
 Keep your eyes down and scan for reward.
 Watch them born again, repeatedly, marine.

The way the word unnamed became unarmed.
 The way a blow to the head became a blow
 to the heart, how cruelty warps the tongue.

Yet the forest grows up and us woven in it,
 already fathoms down and singing cellular
 where the ground once was, and our words

for world migrating. Our streets rise up,
 like ribbons, oar-weed, rooted tangle.
 Suddenly walking the vertical, finding

ourselves swimming in uncertain light,
 gills breaking out, to adapt, if only to adapt
 without knowing what will right us

without surface or air. Caught waiting
 in the doorway, he was shoeless.
I am embarrassed, he said, looking down,

the way pavement normalizes as home,
 as if a shoeless state would be no more than
 to tread softly and then their sudden

disappearance. As if all living devastations
are rendered domestic in safe evolution,
the next pair mutating to flip-flops

and then to bloodied feet. Kicking water.
Still he waits while the hours gather,
those bright bubbles collecting underside.

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Fleshy feet lost on the lee, to the receding
 tide, sounding at night. The absence of footfall
 and the screaming birds, their wider surround

given up until a rousing. But here, so much deeper,
 the long chains sway, barely moving in the midst
 of storms and currents, or in the paths of predatory

arrivals, thickets marginalia from a childhood
 fable, thornless and accommodating. I can hear
 the scrabbling of limbs above, the wash in

frequencies, informatic tones. Or venturing out
 ahead of anticipated dramas, rapid explosions
 of encounter, I drag my carapace along

for possible exit, that game of covering the eyes
 ingrained and delusional. *So is it you here, hen?*
 Working your economy, without touching mine.

Eddying past bondage wear, plastic buckets,
 ladders and seaside gelateria, the blooming neon,
 a florescence of night pharmacies provoking fury,

this plying of energy and survival meets
 in the sea's measure, like we might all become
 supple as seals rather than rock-beached

angry as we are, and make from this rush
 a shelter, by some form of caddis principle, husk
 become home. To indicate a hope in metamorphosis

glued to our living, and buoyed up. Bladderless,
but constructing subterranean housings, that
change might happen in more than dreams.

Pure biofuel we become. Mucilaginous thrust,
resisting direction, capture; firing imaginary
will, somehow holds out beautiful making, still.

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Held to place, unknowing. Or by a bruise,
 as darkening conduct under skin, showing up
 in small capillaries past impact sparking

a fretwork in red lines. Attachment building
 from hurt, maybe pain, at that point where
 you think: some *thing* happened here, can't bring it

to mind, was it collision, or did it bloom social
 from beneath. Deeper disorders manifest,
 inevitable constancies just waiting to be read.

A system of ties, and the way the body shows
 its metre unbidden. I woke up with bruises.
 Did you see that happening, or is it broken

auto-immunity painting out its plaint
 as if sleepwalking and nothing to show
 but sodden feet, and briny pathways

dripping over thresholds, my own ghost,
 now guessing at a haunted lifeline
 turned golden green, black as sunflowers,

waxy as that Victorian show on a beach front.
 See what happens to organs where pleasure
 goes coastal wild, how we all suffer!

What house is this now, raising glutinous
 heights? It has grown here so long chained
 to uncertain holdfast, with tools ranged in

intent, rusting saw, painted horse,
scaffolding and underlay, balconies refusing
gentrification in the rain. She came up

flaring outrage. *How would you like it
if this was YOU, with HER doing that
in your street. Answer me.*

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