

## Stereotypes: *At Blue Lake* by Gillian Essex

### At Blue Lake

I climb the fence and walk the steep route down  
My legs complain, their sandaled feet unsure  
But muscle memory finds its way  
Through weather's rearrangement of terrain

I slink between the girls in scant attire  
Hoping I'll un-noticed pass them by  
I'm feeling lumpy, past my prime  
But submerging can't be hurried at this time

*How did you get here?* a girl asks me  
Perhaps the question is rhetorical  
I gesture vaguely, *from up there*  
*Oh, I came by road*, she says, surprised

The girls dip toes, intentions disappear  
They chirp, *it's freezing*, I don't want to hear  
A young man bravely plunges in  
*Fuck!* he says then beats a swift retreat

The lake has not relinquished winter's chill  
But pools are closed and this is all there is

A couple joins me in my slow advance  
The girl says, *you've done well to get this far*  
Who'll be first to finally immerse?  
To my surprise, as well as theirs, it's me

They follow suit and as we swim we chat  
Rejoicing in our shared humanity  
This moment that transcends all else  
Releasing me from limits of my age

*Gillian Essex*

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### Age on the Page – Poetry Challenge 2021

All poems were judged anonymously, and poet Anne M Carson awarded poems which combined literary merit with how well the poem addressed any of the 5 categories identified in the competition:

- *What It Means to be an Elder*
- *Independence*
- *Stereotypes*
- *Identity*
- *Wisdom*

### Judge's comments:

This poem celebrates going beyond age-based stereotypes by describing the narrator's walk down to, and swim at Blue Lake, the famed lake, I imagine in Mt Gambier. Three times the poet describes ways that expectations of 'proper' behaviour for an older person were subverted – climbing the fence, (rather than going in through a gate), coming down the banks (rather than via the road) and being the first amongst a group of younger swimmers to immerse. The poem ends with all the swimmers "rejoicing in shared humanity" in a way that, as the poet says "releases her from the limits of age."