

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."