

Migrations

By Louise Wallace

1

They came on waka with sails curved like moons.
Hundreds of grunting, sweating men,
paddling away from the hills, their home,
looking to stars, whales and birds,
their salt-plastered bodies in danger of being blown over,
or worse, washed away.
I do not have a story of such adventure
but I come from the sea, just the same.

2

We move between Gisborne and Opotiki
in and out, like the tide.
When the mud is up, Nana takes us to the flats,
we dig our heels in and we do the twist.
At night we feast on steamed cockles –
lustrous pearls we dip in vinegar.

3

At school we watch *The Silent One*
about a boy who can neither hear or speak,
who no one wants to understand
except for a giant white turtle.
In the end, the boy is the same as the sea
and he has powers the others could not have imagined.

4

I reach the age when I have to leave –
everything will change.
This new place is a city, the sea an afterthought.
I walk by water's edge, path instead of sand,
and there is a darkness to this ocean

I have never seen before –
syrupy and thick like black tar.
It wants to pull you in, and because life is much harder here,
sometimes you want to let it.

5

When nobody wants me I return to the sea.
I go for long walks on the beach with my mother
and I cry. *Plenty more fish*, she says.

6

I make my own migration across the Pacific.
Here I am strange, yet the sea familiar,
it is the sliver you can see from the road.

7

I return, a storm-ravaged traveller,
to finally find the one, where I never thought to look.
He is from the sea too
and we get new jobs and travel by boat
and move to a new ocean together.
I collect wood from the beach for winters
and I can see us old together,
sitting on the porch, warm smells from inside,
grass and salt on the out, the skin on my hands
dry and twisted like the wood,
watching the waves roll in and suck back out –
something you can count on.
We look to the stars and seabirds
for our last direction,
happy we have journeyed all this way,
yet barely moved at all.