

IF I MET A TIGER

(I'd Let It Eat Me)

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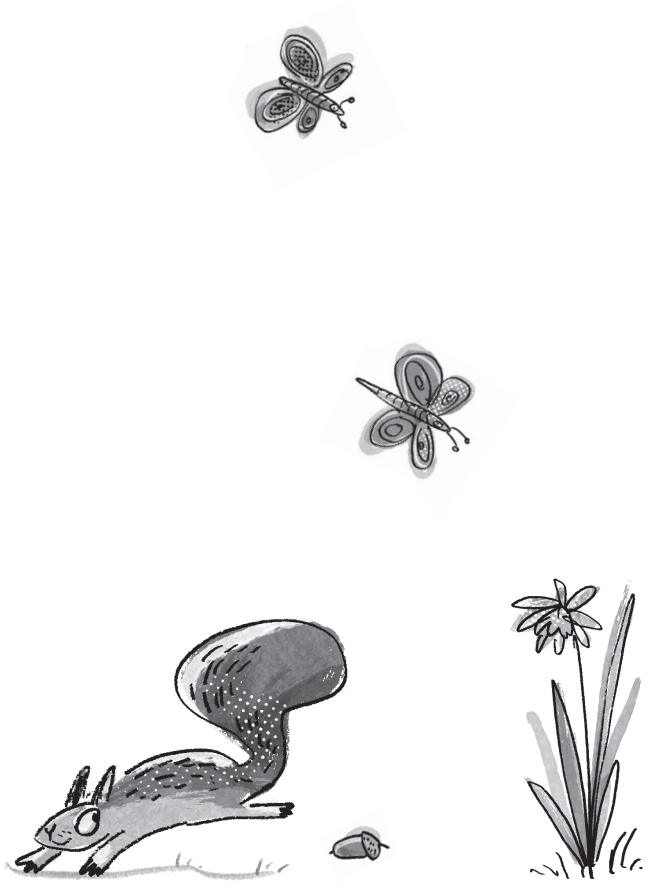
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For Lara and Dylan – please stop poking the animals – AFH

For Mia and Neli and all the Tigers out there – MB



Introduction

I don't know about you, but every time I go out the door, or look out the window, there's the world sitting there waiting for me. And so much of the world is filled with the environment, and some of that's filled with nature and weather and animals and trees and stuff, that sometimes when I sit down to write a poem it all sort of leaks in.

And so here are the poems I've written while looking at, walking through and thinking about the natural world all around us.

It's really as simple as that.



1
Home and Garden

These are the poems in which I think about our pets and the things we might see around the house, or from our window, or when we're out walking in the park or the woods. Some of the poems are imagined and some are real, by which I mean they actually happened to me and to cats I know. I'll let you try to work out which are which.

Mud

There's a lot of mud.

It's all over the countryside.
And the garden.
And under the trees in the woods.

You can even find it
in your sandwich sometimes,
if you're not careful.

It's on football pitches
and rugby players' faces
and hippos wallow in it.

Rivers wash it out to sea, even.

It's in plant pots
and in tomato grow bags
and in the seed trays in the greenhouse,
and it goes right up the edge
of the mountains.

So why
is Dad so upset
about it being on the carpet?
And on the stairs?
And on the landing?
And in my bed?



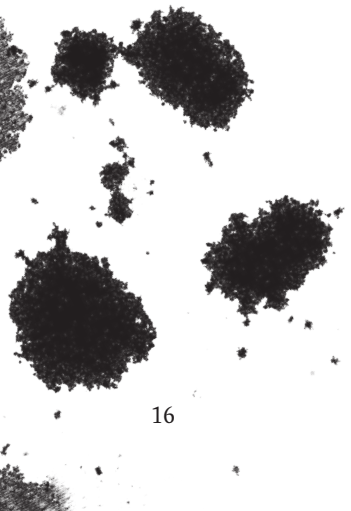
Playing With Dog Next Door

I love to doodle
pictures that are rude, all
over my neighbour's poodle.

I'd like to tell you
its name is 'Noodle',
but it's not.

It's called a lot of things,
like 'Oi!'
and 'Get away!'
and 'Who's been scribbling on my dog?'

but never 'Noodle the Rudely-Doodled Poodle'
or 'Jessica'.



Good Dog

This dog
doesn't realise
it is a Small Dog.

It is hauling
a stick
the size of

a Very Large Stick
or
a Fairly Small Tree.

It is proud.
It is strong.
It is brave beyond its height.

It is stuck
between
the gate posts.







The Dog and the Pigeons and the Poet

The dog bounced through the pigeons,
spraying them
like water from a garden sprinkler,

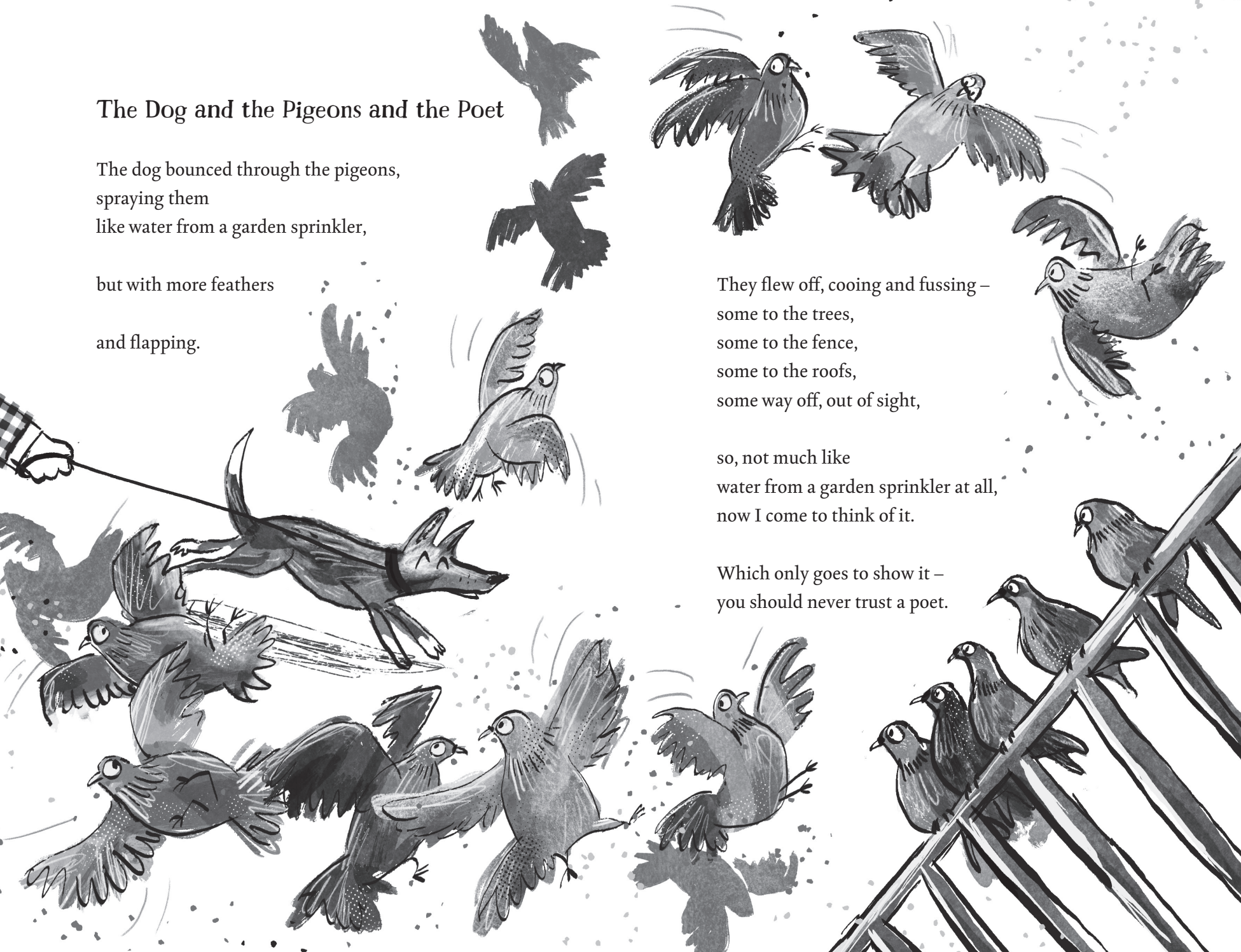
but with more feathers

and flapping.

They flew off, cooing and fussing –
some to the trees,
some to the fence,
some to the roofs,
some way off, out of sight,

so, not much like
water from a garden sprinkler at all,
now I come to think of it.

Which only goes to show it –
you should never trust a poet.

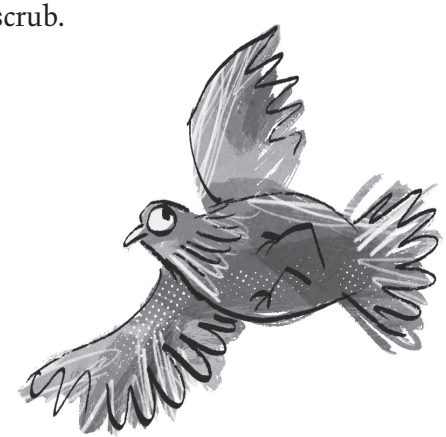


A Poem About Why Some Dogs Don't Like Having Baths

The dog in the bathroom is starting to bark.
He spent the afternoon playing games in the park –
chasing every stick and every thrown ball,
and rolling in the puddles, both the big and the small.

When it started raining and the mud splashed up,
he started rolling around like an excitable pup
who'd never seen a muddy, mucky bit of
ground before.
He got dirty as a dog can get, and then he got more.

But now we've come home, we're indoors in the dry,
and up in the bathroom he begins to cry,
as Mum attempts to shift the caked mud
and the twigs and the grit, and she goes
scrub, scrub, scrub.





But he makes an awful fuss and he makes
an awful row,
and it's *woof*, *bark*, *bark*, *yelp*, *grrr*, *yelp*, *growl*,
and it's *bark*, *yelp*, *woof*, *grunt*, *growl*, *bark*, *howl*,
'cos she's got soap in his eyes and he can't
reach the towel . . .

Because he's a dog and his arms are not long
and with paws instead of hands, well he couldn't hold on
to the towel anyway, so he barks and he cries
as any dog would who got soap in their eyes.

But he'll get his own back on Mum in a minute.
When it's time to dry him off, well, she tries to begin it
by rubbing him dry, but he makes a quick break
and runs into her bedroom for a good old shake.



Cat Washing

I've a flannel in my face.
I rub it everywhere.

The bits I can't reach
I rub with a foot
that I've rubbed with the flannel in my face.

It's wet and bristly,
good at getting things clean.

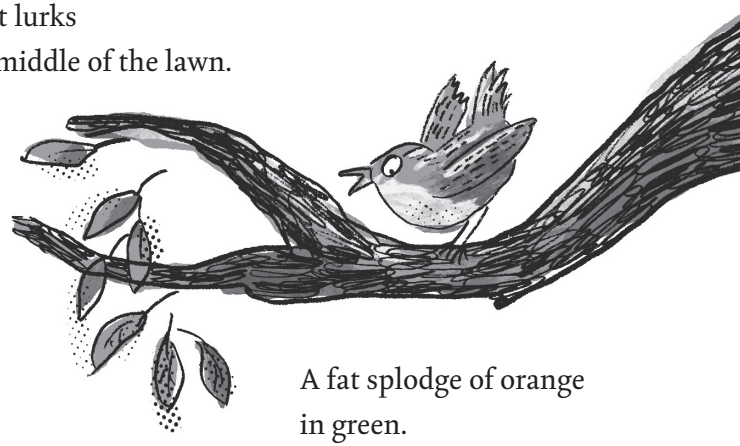
It's a flannel-tongue.
It's a tongue-flannel.

All of me is clean.
I'm clean all over.
So very clean.
Remarkably clean.

Except for
the flannel in my face,
which, I must say,
has its own unique taste.

And the Wren is the Loudest of Them All

The cat lurks
in the middle of the lawn.



A fat splodge of orange
in green.

From the chirping and clicking
and trilling and crawking,

I think that the cat
has been seen.





The Mouse in the Mouth

The mouse thinks he's found
a new way to travel.
Chauffeured through the air.

It's feeling regal, feeling royal,
not scampering, not scurrying,
but lifted, lofted, up from the grass,
in the mouse-wide mouth
of this mouse-eyed cat.

Life is easy
being carried like a kitten,
scruff-necked and dangling.
The whole world view
enlarged from up here –
the garden so wide
in these bead black eyes.

The cat, however,
a wiser mouse might say,
is not the taxi driver
of a tired mouse's dreams.

The cat is nothing but
a ferryman,
hoicking a mouse-soul
free from the mouse-hole.



It Wasn't Even My Birthday

The cat had her head in my shoe.
That's odd, I thought.
But then I didn't think much else about it.

She's got a nose
and likes to smell all sorts of things.
That's cats for you.
Sniffing the floor, the door, the chair leg.
Sniffing the ankle, the food bowl, the flower bed.
Sniffing the air, the fur, the teacup.
That's just what cats do –
sniff, *sniff*,
rub, *rub*.

So it wasn't until much later
that I remembered her by the back door
sniffing my shoe,
head right in it.
How funny she'd looked.

I needed to go to the shops.
So I sat down
and pulled the first shoe on,
preparing to leave the house.

And then I found
the mouse.

Dog Food

Aged six and a half,
Algernon wanted a dog
desperately.

One day he came home from school
and his mum said,
'Go look in the garden, Algie'.
In the middle of the lawn
was a tin of dog food.

The label was torn in such a way
that the word 'Food' was missing.
It just said, 'Dog'.

Although Algernon
wasn't fooled into thinking
this was actually a pet dog,

he went inside and thanked his mum.
After all,
she had gone to some effort.

He pretended to be happy
with his new pet.

That evening
he tied a lead round the can's neck
and took it for a walk.

In his back pocket
was the can opener
his mum had given him.

When he got to the park
he slid the opener's blade around the can
and let all the meaty goodness out.

Pretty soon he was surrounded
('sur-hounded' you might say)
by springy tail-wagging dogs of all kinds.

They were so friendly
and their owners let Algernon
throw sticks for them and tickle their tummies.

It was the best afternoon in the park
he'd spent since he'd watched
bread being thrown at the ducks.

Although he still had no pet of his own
to take home,

his mum promised to buy him a new can
every weekend,
which was almost as good.

