

# SYMBIOSIS

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## I

### **Manta cleaning station**

A hundred metres out in the blue  
where the current warms  
and a single large coral bommie  
strides the seabed

you will find them,  
lined up like cars at a carwash  
their gliding wings stilled  
mouths passively slack.

They wait their turn for the cleaning ritual  
covered by clouds of cleaner-fish,  
blue-streak wrasse, clarion angelfish,  
scarlet shrimp

pick debris from the gills,  
swim inside opened mouths  
to trawl small parasites  
from the gill rakers,

pluck dead skin from the outer body  
and sterilise wounds  
in a crackling, buzzing, grunting  
symphony of symbiosis.

The cleaner-fish dart away, fed,  
the manta depart, laundered and healthy,  
large frames rejuvenated  
as they dance through the waves.

## II

**Octopus mating**

As you swim in the deep ocean,  
gentle hum of water swirling round,  
out of nowhere a rock comes to life,  
a kaleidoscope of colours  
reveals the magical octopod.

Minutes before all you saw  
was a grey knobbly rock  
or a tinge of brown in the back of a cave,  
as a sprinkle of snapper pass by  
you may have seen the rapid change to ink-jet black.

Now the octopus is seeking his mate  
arrayed in all his finery,  
a rapid dance,  
injection of spermatophores  
into the waiting pouch  
and it is done.

This is a death act for the male,  
while the female guards her eggs,  
cleans them, fans them with her siphon,  
removing toxic bacteria.

She does not leave her cave  
to hunt or eat  
and when the eggs begin to hatch  
her starving body breathes its last.

### III

#### **Coral partners**

Coral gleams in shining colours  
green, orange, red  
from algae encased within their polyps,  
a mutual partnership.

The algae spin sunlight into energy,  
feeding the marine colonies,  
while the coral bestows shelter  
from deep inside its core.

When the coral bleach  
from stress and temperature warming,  
they eject their partner algae,  
an act of self-destruction.

We are all bleaching  
in this world of unmindful living  
so bent on our misguided paths  
that we don't even know it.

**Chantal Juanita Stewart**