

Three Hours Out

Anne McDonald

We got the call three hours out to sea
I know that we were thinking all the same
I wonder is it him or is it me?
We had no choice but wait the hours out
with endless cigarettes and cups of tea,
too harsh for crackling radio to explain
I hope that it was them and wasn't me.

We made talk so small it meant nothing;
the haul we got, the time we lost the nets,
and when I won the each way bet
but still the time dragged every minute single
out of three excruciating hours, coated in
the sour smell of oilskins mixed with salt.

I listed all the possibles for heartache
knowing each man counted out the same.
Was the family affected theirs or was it ours?
Strong men rendered naked in the rain.
As we turned for home and braced against the wind
a small crowd gathered silent on the quay,
my head spun somewhere between fear and hope
I wished that it was them and wasn't me.

Our hearts broke for the man whose news it was,
as hands reached down to haul him from the deck,
words whispered on the winds were "cot" and "death."
Feeling glad then sickened with the shame,
but knowing it was not my news to claim.
We got the call three hours out to sea
I wished it wasn't him, that it was me.