

HELEN HORTON

INNISFAIL PIER

Four ladies fishing on the pier steps  
where yesterday a mangrove heron  
had briefly stood to preen.  
Cotton-clad, plump bulk of form,  
silent as the water that runs  
wrinkling around the piles  
tide-urged.

Between the mooring ropes of boat  
a nylon line darts out  
straight as the thrust of a heron's bill,  
that one quick flick of wrist enough  
to link the mass of inert patience  
and the light-fingered deftness  
of dark gentle hands.

"Catchem bait" – a little giggle,  
the others not even looking until in a short  
voluble burst of their own tongue  
they left, bucket quarter full.

Later, the heron returned  
and stealthily tiptoeing the low-tide bank  
stabbed the minnow-hinting water  
with his yellow-beaked eye.