

“Oh!” she paused. “Well, I’m willing to come to some arrangement . . . ”

But she broke off, noticing that the arrangement was already being made . . .

“Darling,” he murmured, curling around her in contentment. “My impression is that our interaction was imbalanced. I’m ready to acknowledge that I may have been at fault to some degree. What is your perception? I feel we should talk about it . . . ”

But his sleepy voice, serene and easy, joined the slumber of his body.

Anne suffered a moment of guilt at her blatant passivity, wondered how she was going to face next week’s women’s group, then recalled the last rule in assertiveness training:

“One has the right to choose *not* to assert oneself.”

She breathed a sigh of relief, leaned over and switched out the light.

Having died down almost completely, the rain was now tapping very gently on the roof.

PETER KIRKPATRICK

ANOTHER FISH STORY

Laconic Thommo, that soulful fisherman,
was friendly with my father: they’d take
a boat out all day long and bring it back
slithering with the silver catch,
the boards running in sea-blood.

Once, out of the blue, a squall coming up
and Dad slowly pulling at the oars to edge
them round a headland, Thommo said
Row. End of conversation.

Row, John . . . Row. The sea shushed.

ROW, John. But so John did, bewildered
and beginning to get snarly.

JOHN, ROW! Said Thommo.

ROW! ROW! ROW!

The rower turned round, scowling, to behold
a bank of water not to be believed
billowing and curling a long wet lip
to tear them on a rockwall's broken teeth.

And he did row, emphatically — my father
always told the story safely home:
he and Thommo were the ones who got away.
But any smiles over their blunt double silence
as they made the usual propitiations
of guts and scales to the snapping shallows
you felt were set with a fear fishbone-cold.

JOHN HANDS

UNDER OBSERVATION

This is the final stage: beyond this room there is
No further station. How did you imagine it might be?
A flatlet shared with friends, a corner in your children's home?
A house with a garden, a cottage by the sea?
You were travelling, there was time to look out, somewhere
You were sure you had settled for it all; these
White coats were not envisaged: all your fellow-travellers seemed
Friends or neighbours; how did that hopeful journey end? How
Did these changes come about? These questions seem uncalled for,
That journey an illusion; all that remains is the draught from the
door,