

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,

Your noisy neighbour's demented rambling: the cries
From the next compartment; your pesting for a bed-pan
Or another pillow. Yet lie still a little longer:
Someone still may come.
To move you into the sun.

CHARLOTTE CLUTTERBUCK

TODAY

At eleven weeks
the baby lay within your womb,
sucking its thumb.
You let them rip it from you,
your innocence discarded in a bucket.
When you most needed me, I was not there.

Years later the second woman
told me that widowed, her child killed,
alone, and pregnant by some one-night-need,
she could not keep the baby, but found strength to give
a daughter to the childless.

Today your second-chance children
play with mine as we plant trees.
Your lost child has no grave, no name,
no place or touch, no memories.
Here, now, take this spade,
hew from this hard earth a space
so we can plant his meaning.