

HELEN HORTON

FISHERWOMAN

She sits for hours
at the end of the pier —
the sea sucking open-mouthed
at time-wasted pilons
wraps around her consciousness,
drags at the barriers of her mind
till she lets them down —
to find a child
shouting in excitement at his first catch,
growing years in an afternoon
of success —
 growing years,
and the fish leaping
back and forth between them
man and boy, husband and son,
 ghost and ghost.

How many years
had she sat beside them —
both — or one —
with thermos and hamper packed
for their companionship,
 with the salt spray biting her lips
 and the salt wind
 wiping its feet on her face,
and when at last there was no need
to insulate in coat and hat
and walk the mile,
pushing out her place in the wind,
mapping her island on the wooden pier,
she found the still-born comfort of her home
insipid by comparison,
the air trapped —
and took the basket, rod and line
back to the familiar jetty,
 with the green tide side-slapping
 on the worn piles spaced like years,

and the green water beckoning
through its fence of grey shrunken decking.

Sea gulls wheel and fight
for scraps of self-preservation,
a lonely gannet slices the sky
stabbing the sea for filling,
and far out on the horizon
shearwaters pass low
along their own unswerving stream
of pre-destination.

The wind wraps her in strips of memories
that tug at her mind more often
than the fish upon her line.
Yet she baits and casts
and draws them all in —
the fish at least are tangible
representing happiness.