

The rope walk

The room is terrible long,
the ceiling upon us.

No windows. Shutters.
Usually shut. The threads
of light that come come

crusted in salt and dust.
The machines yell, more
machines yell back and that

is the noise of the place.
Sometimes I hear shanties
in it. To walk backwards

like a ropemaker. Backlins.
You must dance with your
eyes never once not once

turning from the ropes
which must not cross or
kink. Mirk-dim. Mirlygo.

The blatter and the throng
become the new silence.
And the air is full of triangles

and I don't know any longer
what to do with the quiet.

1989

I became vegetarian
and the freezing works

closed down. My father
lost his job and sat all day

in each seat of the house
and stared at me. I never

knew where I would find him.
I liked him then, doleful

and angry, stuff opening
and closing in front of him

like the mouth
of some dumb fish.

Later there were fights.
Later he started smiling.

He chose the right-
hand side of the sofa.

His breath smelt different.
The city puckered

around the place
the works had been,

like skin around the
place it's been punctured.

Heidi and me'd meet there
walk around the white

building, counting
the broken windows,

talk of man's awesome cruelty –
how they'd stun the cows

before they killed them
to hide the fear

and keep the meat
soft and sweet.

Ann

Loss is a white bound package
so tightly wound, there can be no
leaks, nothing seeping through,
like the Egyptians, only no writing,
no pictures, no gold paint.
Loss is what slips into the sea,
like a silky silver fish sent home.

There were three that day,
only one of them mine.
Each time there was no resistance.
Each time the water closed over at once
like a wound's uncanny healing.

On land there would have been ropes
at least, a gradual lowering,
the throwing of earth.
A stone to mark the spot.