

## Thoughts at sea



Sometimes  
When we are out at sea  
There are islands,  
Rough, ragged, jagged rocks  
Ready to lure ships  
To be holed and torn.

Captain and navigator  
Steer a clever course  
Between, around, and past  
Leaving the siren stones  
Behind, folorn.

And sometimes  
There are islands in the air,  
Cloud countries  
That change and drift and loom,  
Now tinged with sunset golds.  
Now white, now grey.

Passengers hold cameras high,  
Hoping to catch  
The beauty of the skies,  
Imprison it to watch later  
On a less spectacular day.

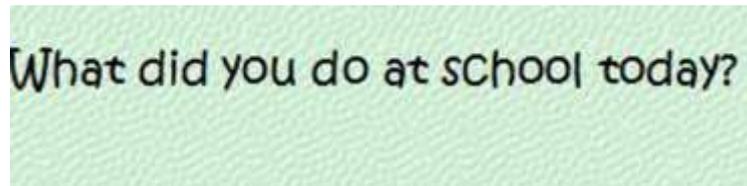
And then  
There are ideas that form,

Skimming over the waves,  
Dipping into the foam,  
Breathtaking in their immensity,  
New born and still blind.

I watch them unfolding,  
Children of the vast sea,  
Space ships of the ocean  
Inexorably building huge island  
Gardens in my mind.

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## **Handwriting**



My hands hurt.  
Anxiety presses pins, needles, nails  
Into my knuckles  
The pads of my fingers  
And my thumb.  
“Don’t press so hard.  
It’s bound to hurt,” they say, “gripping like that,”  
but then they add  
“You have half an hour to finish,” and wonder  
Why I stress so.  
The words are easy.  
If I could type them on a keyboard,  
Neat and bright  
In a well presented paper, I could have ended this  
An hour ago.  
“You don’t complain  
When it’s maths,” they say sadly, but  
Maths is beautiful  
And I can ignore the pain to get  
Those numbers formed.  
Meanwhile, they want  
Three sentences that explain some words  
I have understood  
For ever and a day, and you must understand  
My hand is numb.

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## Meeting.



Words skip across the internet  
falling rowdily into emails,  
excited and on edge  
with the thrill of planning.

They tumble from mobiles  
texted with trembling fingers  
(on a train then on a bus)  
with the joy of arrival.

A few gush (from the same mobiles)  
identifying time and place,  
worried and intense  
with the concerns of finding.

Many bound across a table top  
skirting drinks and food,  
relaxed and confident  
with the pleasure of the moment.

At last they sigh into the night air  
slipping softly into departure,  
glad, sad, remembering  
until needed again.

*(image by Pexels on Pixabay)*

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## Shoes.



Every night we would lay them  
Lined up for inspection beside the scullery door.  
If anyone forgot there would be a shocked whisper:  
Don't you need them clean for tomorrow?

Grandpa would assault them with oxblood polish  
And a soft brush until they shone with love.  
It was no use buying beige, tan or even chestnut;  
In the end all reached a state of rich mahogany.

One day a tramp came knocking.  
A bite to eat, Missus? Or a shilling for the road?  
He was all tatters and flaps;  
His feet scuffed on the ground through worn spaces.

Grandpa brought him a pair no-one wore.  
They fitted well enough.  
He ate his bowl of soup, admiring them with a sly glance.  
Sit down, Man! I'll polish them before you go!

And so he sat and Grandpa knelt,  
Worked with the oxblood and brush  
Until even the tongues gleamed,  
And the difficult seams where the uppers meet the soles.

When he had done, the tramp thanked him,  
Abruptly, quietly, and rose.  
On the way he murmured,  
'But he didn't polish the eyelet holes.'

Seriously slighted? Or making slanted fun  
Of all the fuss over a new-old pair of shoes?  
No-one would ever know, but Grandpa's laughter  
Followed him down the country road.

And I remember Grandpa telling the tale of the eyelet holes  
To anyone who'd listen, for weeks and weeks,  
And then he'd shake his head and ask  
If we'd all remembered to bring him our shoes.