
Rain

Judith Beveridge

Grennan sucks in air along his gums and yells
again to Davey who is filling the trough
of the gunwhale with scrabbling crabs. Far off
lightning slips down the sky like a forkful
of buttered sea-worms. The rain works fast

cutting with decisive precision across
the sea. Grennan pulls in squid, then severs
the slimy cordage of the tentacles, throws
one at Davey who laughs; his voice hard, sharp
as a scuttling tool. He brings up more pots

as wind rattles the uneven links that his palms
pay in before he lets down the crash of
another stone-weighted creel. The boat pitches
among the waves and their hearts drum
hard as they pull in the loads, their stomachs

rumbling, turning like captured ghosts as
the boat rides a thick swell. Squid ink spreads
across the deck, an oily roil of thunderheads.
The crabs that are in the hold are going claw
to claw, outdoing the clatter of the hail

that falls across the deck like marble scree.

Grennan pierces a squid's eye with the end
of a blade, soft fruit he'll save later for pelicans
when their beaks clash in the quieter air
like dry fronds. These men who toil with ease

through a storm's blow, who pull with fervent
thirsts at the fathomless cold; who watch squid
turn orange, red, green in a spectrum of
unearthly dawns; who follow lightning's flickering
panic, the black slough when clouds flume

their tempests, their dirty weather into shapes
made from ink and thunder; from a darkness
piled up like primordial mud. But they go out
each day happy among the slippery stench
of weather's trouble to work like sea bulls in

the rain's surge and swell ... Grennan
throws another tentacle at Davey who has just
tied a crab's pincer into a crescent moon. He
laughs again, rain spatters against his fingers,
ink like thick rope winding down his arms.