

LIZZIE LISTER

Christmas Day Crossing

It would go like this: she'd see them coming,
a speck on the horizon taking form
of a beached boat; adults and kids scrumming
over samphire, weary, cold, travel-worn.
She would open her door to them, greet
them as they spilled in, mute, fearful, raw-eyed;
a wave-sick salt-sticky gift of the tide.
They'd pass as family. All would be sweet.

There would, of course, be no head-count, no stop
at four, six, eight. What if there were twenty?
We'd all open doors, a communal pot
of comradeship, our generosity
knowing no bounds. In local shops they'd ask
Just the twelve pasties today? Any cream?
A watertight dream, twice-stitched at the seams.
We look through the window. Wait for the craft.

They arrived, hundreds of miles off course -
ninety in two boats. Four dead on the way.
A moonless night, dodging ships in gale force
winds, no toilets, drinks or shelter. Displaced
kids were laid in the manger of state care
but the rest - who knows? Forty-five thousand
this year; too many to chronicle. Sand
grains cleansed by sea, by salt, by dumb-blind air.