

## IN MEMORIAM

*(Sybil Gladys Constant)*

1.

Yes, life is hard, but you knew the secret—  
That if you cupped your hands at the stream  
They would run with optimism and cheerfulness  
And all would be well.

It was a miracle I saw often  
And marvelled at the genius of, but didn't believe,  
Having been born with eyes that could not turn away  
From the awfulness of the need.

I think of all the things you hid:  
That rape in war-ravaged India that you buried,  
And the unborn child that you lost, and how you said  
'Not a day goes by when I do not think of him.'

And I think of the long-delayed aftermath of all this:  
How they found you walking by the sea  
Not knowing who you were, or where,  
And the delirium that followed on the lounge settee

Because you couldn't climb the stairs  
And how even then you felt yourself to be falling  
Falling and no one to catch you  
And how it was all too late when anyone did.

Afterwards you laughed at how silly you'd been  
Calling yourself a daft fool  
For having caused such a fuss and talked such nonsense.  
Worse things happen at sea, you said.

2.

Yes, worse things happen at sea.  
And, after all, you still had your children  
And they and their progeny are what you took  
Such pride in.

And so you bit down on fate,  
That hard slow bullet whose mark is never missed  
Because it is the whole world,  
And you forgot the pain.

You filled yourself daily with the innocence of children  
As if it were opium smoke  
And following your lead  
Children learned how to be children themselves.

And so your life went  
One generation after another  
Sensible to the Universe only if it were five years old  
And walking briskly by your protective, fond, side.

3.

Your end has made me think  
How often the moment of death must be doubly bitter.  
For not only is it when we discover that  
Death is not just something that happens to others

It must also, so often, be the moment when  
The illusion of the goodness of others  
Collapses into dust  
Before our eyes, and is the last thing we see.

Think of the murder victim looking into the eyes of the  
Murderer as life drains away.  
Hell must be—not some judgement on petty wrongs—  
But rather that final, ineradicable, thought taken to eternity.

And so in your final days  
Crippled by cancer pain that had lasted two years  
You took half a Panadeine tablet  
Wanting to save the larger dosages for 'when things got bad'.

And the daughter on whom you had doted  
Sent you to die alone in a hospice, unvisited,  
All but abandoned,  
Because she had booked a holiday.

Heaven save us  
From seeing what you saw then  
When the codeine and the family and the laughter  
Of children ran dry in your brain.

Heaven save those at sea.

*Adrian Heathcote*