

MARION STARLING BOYER

## THE MEN ASLEEP AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD

*The Ross Sea Party, marooned in Antarctica, 1916*

Fumbling, drunk with fatigue  
the men totter towards rest.

Lay shuddering. Sleep.

Darkness. Wraiths of green—aqueous, floating  
queer green light streaming  
as under a green sea

and someone dreamed green  
leaves. Grass.

The sweet hush after the talk of birds.

Someone moaned  
dreaming of the benison of hot water.

Clean beds. The cool kindness of sheets.

Someone stirred, shifting his body, heard  
softly, a woman singing. Remembered

—a child under the piano,  
a mother who smiles as she sings.

Things with balls and bats.

Old Sunday evenings at home.

Children at the table. Simple, homely crust  
of friendly bread and many-tasting food.

White plates and cups, clean-gleaming, ringed with blue.

Hair's fragrance. The scent of limes  
in bloom. In the flowing dress. Tenderness.  
The throb and ache, the thumping heart.  
    Come back. Come back.

And the astonishment of bustling life—  
bank holidays, picture shows, and spats.  
Going to the office in the train.  
    The deep-panting train.

Falling seeds of rain. Water dimpling.  
    Depths of melting blue and green water.  
Dreams flicker. Fade. Dwindle as the wave goes home.

And this heart, where glory burns, slept. And this heart, lost  
    among the stars, slept.  
This heart drifting,  
    dipped contented oars, sighed. And slept.