

SENIOR SECONDARY

Sophie Clark

Winner

Elizabeth College
HOBART NORTH TAS

The Fisherman's Wife

I have known a fisherman,
And I have been the hands,
That held the enemy down,
Firm and steady,
Against the planks,
So its eye,
Solitary and bone white,
Arrogant and pleading,
Gave only the slightest,
Quivering blink,
At the moment of the first incision,
(and I'd swear the thing,
The fish,
Looked right at me?)

When finally I am allowed to loosen the clamps,
My knuckles
Are bone white,
And glistening.

The fisherman has the hands of a surgeon,
And they look odd on him, I think to myself,
Turning from the cordial blood,
That laps at my boots.

I have known a fisherman,
And I have been the witness to the throats,
And have ground my teeth down,
In insomnia,
Thinking of my needle,
And my thread,
And how I have used them to bind salty lives
together,
Then tossed them,
Into the great and crumbling mouth of the ocean,
Obediently.

I have known a fisherman,
And even as I pull,
And pull,
On the hooks that he has rigged me with,
They do not come loose,
They do not come loose.

Even as I shower,
And the cordial blood,
Of our daily enemy,
Circles the drain,
It leaves a stain,
It always leaves a stain.

Judge's comments:

*England's new poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, published an anthology entitled *The World's Wife*, whose poems reinvented history from the point of view of the wives of iconic male identities. Sophie Clark's poem follows that theme and is so well-written that it would not have been out of place in that collection. Like all good poems, its complexity deserves several readings, each one revealing new layers of meaning. Dealing with the ties of matrimony, the conflict between the wife's distaste for her husband's occupation and her assistance in his work, it is a disturbing examination of a woman's dilemma.*

The rhythms and repetitions of the poem create an inexorable pull on the reader, just as the hooks in the poem have caught the wife.