

The Drowners

Sadness slumps on a sofa in England's north, growling wrong answers at the telly and supping powdered coffee from a Pistols mug, cracked like a broken heart.

Dad shows me photos of him in his youth, and there's hardly any resemblance, that version all slick-thorned hair and bovver boots like bricks. Now he knows the Inland Revenue number

by memory, his post-coital cigarette. He scrapes the dishes bare before Mum comes home in that same tea-coloured cardie and spiritless Gail Platt haircut, her voice an analog crackle.

By my teen years, I'd watched their tight-lipped kisses grow even more empty with each carwash, crossword, obligatory sport's day. Anniversaries spent at *Wok This Way*

takeaway, dining on thick, oily sauce, menus breezed over like red energy bills. I remember walking home from school last Christmas, navy jumper ribbed with salt-grit snow,

pale houses pulsing with fairy lights on our slim, quiet street where urban and suburban collapse into each other, and there's my dad in the window, just sitting in his dole day chair.

That's when I learned that crying can feel as necessary as drifting into the ocean. But once you're in there treading water, you don't know when you might sink.