

## *The Mermaid in the Hospital*

She awoke  
to find her fishtail  
clean gone  
but in the bed with her  
were two long, cold thingammies.  
You'd have thought they were tangles of kelp  
or collops of ham.

'They're no doubt  
taking the piss,  
it being New Year's Eve.  
Half the staff legless  
with drink  
and the other half  
playing pranks.  
Still, this is taking it  
a bit far.'  
And with that she hurled  
the two thingammies out of the room.

But here's the thing  
she still doesn't get —  
why she tumbled out after them  
arse-over-tip . . .  
How she was connected  
to those two thingammies  
and how they were connected  
to her.

It was the sister who gave her the wink  
and let her know what was what.  
'You have one leg attached to you there  
and another one underneath that.  
One leg, two legs . . .  
A-one and a-two . . .

Now you have to learn  
what they can do.'

In the long months  
that followed  
I wonder if her heart fell  
the way her arches fell,  
her instep arches.

THE MERMAID IN HOSPITAL/ 'crib' of  
AN MHURÚCH SAN OSPIDÉAL.

When she woke/ and looked down for her fishtail/ there is was  
gone!/ Inside in the bed with her/ were these two long cold  
yokes./ You'd swear they were switches of kelp/ or sides of  
meat./

'They must be coddin' me!'/ What else do you expect on New  
Year's Eve--/ half of the staff out of their minds/ on drink/  
and the other half/ a shower of practical jokers./ But come  
here, this thing is going/ a wee bit far'/ and with that she  
fecked the pair of them/ out of the room./

But here's the bit / she can't understand;/ how out of the bed  
she flew/ right after them 'cocks-um-bo-head'./ What were those  
two yokes to her/ and what had she to do / with them ?/

The nurse it was tipped her the wink/ told her what the score  
was --/'That's a leg you have tied to you there,/ and another  
one there beside below it./ Ooone leg, twooooo legs/ one and  
. . . . two! / Now you must learn / what they can do !'

In the long months/ that followed/ you'd wonder/did / her  
instep ever fail her/ did her heart fall/ as her arches fell?/

## *The Merfolk and Washing Hair*

Since they've put water entirely behind them  
they can't as much as take a bath.  
They wash their dishes in a mixture of urine and ashes  
with a pinch of sand added to it  
and you have to admit that with all the hard effort they put  
into it  
they really get those dishes gleaming.

Their bodies they bathe with oil and rose water  
and they clean their hair with dry shampoo  
(an artificial substance that they get at the chemist's)  
or even with talcum powder.

The odd time  
they do wash their hair  
it's with lukewarm water.  
This ritual must be performed  
before the setting of the sun,  
a custom for which there's a very good reason.

There was one female amongst them long ago who was up  
late pounding flax  
and she had two girls in working for her.  
She told them they should wait to wash their hair  
when the late-night work was finished.

That turned out to be very late in the night  
and when she didn't as much as give them a bite to eat  
one of the girls put a pinch of ashes in her mouth  
and the other one a piece of chaff.

The knock came to the door  
in the dead of night  
and a voice sang out,  
'Off you dash, belly full of ash.

Stay on my behalf, belly full of chaff.  
Let the empty belly evermore  
be at this door.'

With that the woman of the house and the girl who had eaten  
the ash were gone  
and all that was left was the girl who had eaten the chaff.

This story is still being told, to this very day,  
to scare the living daylights  
out of the young females of the species.