Vera

Emily Cargan

A woman's body found, afternoon, 27 December 1994, in Belfast Lough at Seapark near Holywood, 50–70 years old. Wore a grey tweed coat with a British Legion badge in the lapel and a necklace bearing the name of Vera.

What was it? Was the milk off?
This Christmas season, winter not shaping at
all to freeze the ground and no birds to nurture in
thick fell snow with crumbs sugar mixed and
hot water wetted. No matter.
The chain cool against your neck,
your badge from the British Legion
high in lapel. Last night you'd led
the carol singing. Peace and hope, Hallelulia.
The lough bemused.
Our swans flown off now. Some say to Iceland.
Hadn't you a friend once who'd moved to Iceland?
She'd taken up with a native man, planned to write her poetry
while gutting fish to keep herself.
Gave up a good job in the city library. You'd no more credit
it than salt water on the moon.
Never stayed in touch. With any from the
past. So much to do, especially now and
the weather crowing hot to the strut of game winds.
Two trips needed to empty the ashes: one for the pan &
another for yourself. Ash in your apron pockets.
Vera, the freezer is your enemy
full to thawing: dinner left ready.