

I Hope You Stopped for the Swans

Cecilia Knapp

This poem explores the impact of a son's death on his father and family.

It's hard to recognise longing
filling up the body like a rock pool.
Looking behind me at the wall.
Why is it always four o'clock?

I hear knocking when I'm sleeping,
but don't see your face anymore.
Come inside. Shake the water off, my love,
you've had a skinful.

Somewhere our dad is on a hill
with his waterproof map.
He'll send me a long text later about
being at London Bridge, eating a Cornish pasty.

I'll reply, 'Renationalise the railways!'
by which I mean, I love you
and I'm sorry your son died.
How we used to beg him to bury us in the sand.

There are small mercies; my soft father.
I don't think about him crumbling apart
on the kitchen stool,
how seven minutes later he was back to normal,
singing under his breath, spreading apricot jam.
The sky is thin today
like a torn-off blister
and he is underneath it, walking.