

Two Poems

KERRY-LEE POWELL

The Lifeboat

All night in his lifeboat my father sang,
To keep the voices of the other men
Who cried in the wreckage from reaching him.

He sang what he knew of the requiem,
Of the hit parade and the bits of hymns.
He sang until he would never sing again,

Scalding his raw throat with sea-water,
Until his ribs heaved, until the salt
Wept from his eyes on dry land,

Flecked at his lips in his squalling rages,
Streaked the sheets in his night sweats
As night after night the re-assembled ship

Scattered its parts on the shore of his bed
And the lifeboat eased him out again,
To drown each night among singing men.

The Emperor

His bent antenna hooked it
And like a legendary fish,
It hauled us off the highway
So we could be submerged by it.

Beethoven's Emperor, my old man, and I
Crammed into his last great wreck.
The windows taped shut, the ice holes
Carved in the windshield

Slowly misting over with our breath.
The notes came high and icily,
Then deepened into thunderheads,
Filling the car with cut glass

That crackled into the static
Of another radio station's maniacs.
He reeled the dial back in.
And my father, now twenty years dead,

Conducted the piano and the lead violin.
His bony finger arcing overhead,
He leans to me across the leatherette.
This is how you do it, he says.