

Adult Highly Commended

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Ruth

You don't know this, but
your voice; part marble, part bell,
is what they come home for;
your boys, their friends

They think your voice
comes from underneath
the deep underbelly of the earth's core.
With the quality of every healer that ever lived

East London. Estuary.
They actually think that
your voice is a surge of water
hugging the Thames.

First there's the hearing, then there's the imagining;
That your words say something practical, factual,
then, that your words are an antidote
That your words are a bandage or a cool drink

You can't do anything about the knives
But you can fix the wounds, deftly, and without fuss

On the hottest of summer days,
those boys, when you take their coats and get their tea,
when you say hello.
Well, you're not really saying hello are you?

You're not really saying the market is closed today
You're not really asking them how their day was

In conversations mostly about practical matters,
you may not know it but you offer refuge. Whatever you say,
you might as well have put a blanket round those boys
Offered them amnesty

They think it is your house that is a sanctuary, but it's you.

You are the safe place