

10th January 1866

Thomas Pengelly here.
There go my children, playing in them nets again.
I can hear 'em laughing from where I stand.
Emmy calls from the doorway, drying her hands on her apron.
She's smiling, bless her. 'Tis a fine morning in Brixham, and I thank God for it.

Ye should see the harbour this morning. Red sails as far as the eye can see.
Men busy about their work. The smell of fish and tar, salt in the air,
gulls crying for scraps. No better place in the world to earn a living.
I've fished these waters all my life, as did my father before me.
BM76's a good boat. She's strong. She'll look after us.

Emmy's a good woman. Keeps the home proper. Keeps all of us right.
Worries when the weather turns, though she'll never say so.
I'd be home afore sunset, sat by the fire with Emmy and the young'uns.

By noon, all I could see of Brixham was a thin line upon the horizon.

By afternoon, the sky began to change.
Old Jack Tucker stood looking west. He's never one for many words.
"Summat troubling thee, Jack?" I said.
"Best make it an early one."

I thought of the catch. We've had a good trip.
It'll mean a good price, some extra for Emmy, something new for the children.
A bad storm can take a fisherman's catch.
I've seen it before. I hoped this time it would pass us by.

But by evenin' the wind had a bite to it. By nightfall it had teeth.
The first sea struck me full in the face.
Lord above, it were cold. Cold enough to steal a man's breath.
The wind screamed through the rigging. BM76 lurched and groaned.
Waves like mountains, risin' out of the dark and comin' down on us.

We worked the boat with all we had.
We bailed. Hard and steady. Again and again.
Bucket after bucket over the side, and still she filled.
We lashed ourselves to the rails. One slip and you'd be gone.
Every breath tasted of salt.

I thought of Emmy. Wondered if she'd lit the lamp.
Emmy always lit the lamp when the weather turned.
Said it helped guide us home. I don't know if it ever did.
But I hoped it might that night.
Wondered if the children were asleep.
Wondered if they were waiting for me.

We weren't heroes.
We were fathers and husbands trying to get home.

Lifeboats grew. Harbour protection improved.
Let there be better protection next time.
Brixham gained a safer future.

And as for what became of me?
Well...
There's a story to be told about that.

The sea keeps its secrets.