

Anna Curnow

To the wharf in winter

Down Wharf Road with its flower gardens
And central avenue of flax beds,
Past the War Memorial Hall,
Staunch since Nash's opening.
Its like taking a sea-breath as you climb
Up and over the stop bank flank
To reach the Ruawai Wharf.

A gull calls a blustery cackle
Beneath a steely blue winter sky,
Puffed with shadowy, fretful clouds.
It hovers above, wings outstretched,
Then leans into the wind and arcs away
As a sharp shower flits over,
Eclipsing the faraway bank.

Heavy silt-laden river swells
Heave against low-slung rough rubble banks,
Bound taut with fresh grainy cement.
A tight embrace against the tide.
Along the harbour shores, mangroves huddle,
Their twisted trunks tangle thigh-deep,
Branches clasp and fold shoreward.

On a better day, boats would launch here,p
From the ramp ringed round with slick sea-foam;
The carpark stacked full of trailers.
A place of expecting, waiting;
An open mouth to the harbour that feeds;
A well-worn, watery track;
A birthplace of great and tall tales.

Beyond the wire fence and homespun gate,
Two white, thickset, wide-bottomed boats
Sit low in the slapping water,
Trussed tight with salt crusted ropes.
“Stealth” looms over “Jo-Marie”, her white bulk
Waiting for moon and fish to bite;
For friends to take friends out.

There is an edge to this place; a sting;
A history lived fiercely, recently;
An unfinished mightiness.
The Kaipara needs no finesse.
“Not for navigational purposes”
A weathered Council signboard notes.
Here, you must make your own way.