

A poem by Richard Parkinson, 2023

*Summer blows through the Zuider Zee
surging waves against dykes when tides run,
shifting sands shaping shallow lands
behind the Frisian isles and cold North Sea.
Now by day the windmills are stilled
in once fields of flowers
and starry nights of painted visions
(That shone from the eyes of a haunted man)
the only light upon the strand
now taken from the sea.
A day when two bright shiny things,
once also below the waves,
jump like flying fish
out of a canal near a dyke-
Barbed wire and tanks in Polderland.*

The boy in the panama with gangly legs
dreams of a lucky find.
No food for days for the two of them
with a bundle of bowl, a knife and spoon,
fleeing the town and not looking back,
just gone astray,
keeping out of sight.

*"I was lying by the water's edge,
Half asleep with only the insects.
I heard this splash and saw the flash
of a fish that jumped
right out of the water*

*and close to me.
It jumped I swear,
beside another already there,
without wings so it must have jumped.
Fish do jump sometimes don't they?
It must have followed its friend
onto the grass.*

*The fish jumped again when I touched it.
I thought it dead, but it seemed alive,
a silver flashing slippery thing
wriggling in panic
and gasping in air."*

And that's what happened that hot afternoon
as he lay dreaming on the river bank.
Two fish from God lay within his reach.
Oh how hard they had prayed for food.

She had prayed with hands like fists
and eyes clenched teary tight
For she knew God would find a way,
If she could send the prayer ok

One bowl, a spoon, knife and fire.
Cut and gutted with the bones removed,
two fish stuck with a stick beside the coals,
in a burnt out shell struck huis.

My sister will not starve, she will not die,
I promised Moedertij on the Talmud that day
before the men in black came back
And stole mother's life away.

So now little Anika and I,
with our bundle of bowl, knife and spoon
and proud Pappa's pajama hat,
jump like fish from place to place.

Two live slippery kids.

Fish out of water.

Wriggling in panic
and gasping for air.

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