

Maid

*'I saw the new moon late yestreen
With the auld moon in her arm.'
- Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens*

I am Margaret, daughter of Erik. Motherless,
cradled in the belly of a ship. The wind sings to me,
song for a queen.

About me swirls a tide of lords and ladies,
jeweled, preening: they whisper, bicker,
fawn their flattery. I watch.

Stars darken: wind girns in the rigging,
stays shudder. The lift, a hissing, sucking void,
conjures a gale, breenging, buffeting,
snatching seamen's cries.

Below, in the stifling dark full of the mewing
note of fear, I shrink from the stench, the din,
the wheeling, the wheeling, giddy tilting.
Sailors cram the splintering hull with bolts of silk,
: pearls dribble over the filthy floor,
ignored.

No respite from the wracking, retching ills:
no point in tears.
How long?

hands raise me up: Clamour, a ragged, crowd,
pale daylight, a smirr of rain, gull-cry, thin and high,
women weeping and the tolling of a bell.
It is far off.
All drains to whiteness. I begin to hear
the song of morning.

Poetry - Sheila Macleod
Music – Catriona Price