

CHRISTMAS

I have feelings too you know.
You spoilt my Christmas too you know.
Not that I ever expected to like it.
Not that I have so long as I can remember.
Not that you don't always.

The years pass.

The phone-calls merge into one another.

Different places,

different shades of plastic receiver pressed against my ear.

Same harsh words and lack of understanding,

same tears welling, sometimes pouring,

same held-back, choked-back arguments and objections.

Same old story.

Somebody said they enjoyed Christmas for once this year,
and I said it would happen to me too some day.

I never thought of that till then.

Someone else said we could rent a cottage by the sea.

All grey skies and grey beaches,
and the rain running down the panes outside;

condensation and slippers,

and us curled up with the telly, snuggling;

electric blankets and baked potatoes and early nights.

Evenings on sofas in front of gas-fires

and bowls of hot soup

and thick jumpers and us kicking through puddles -

Someone else said you can't just run away from it though.

And I said can't, why can't I?

You said next year, we'll do all that next year;

this year come with me.

And so in someone else's hallway

with an unfamiliar grey receiver pressed against my ear,

the tears streamed down my cheek.

And the wrong person put their arm round me.

And outside the rain beat down on the dismal southern England landscape,

and wind howled through leafless skeleton trees until eventually it grew dark.