

Empty Envelope

by Yasaman Bagheri

Falling off the sinking boat
With our hands held against the waves,
We kept the pattern to rescue
Every second's worth and stretched to a lifetime.

Inside the cloud of spilled gasoline and blood
When hope was sinking down
Hands reached to rescue.
Our disappeared boat was given a name,
(U)nifrom (L)ima (A)lpha.

As if water had washed our names away;
Instead, numbers had appeared
From one to a hundred and two.
We were (re)named and handed an envelope -
A message of hope.

Time worked differently in there:
We watched it, counted it;
They got paid for it;
We suffered it, lost it;
Inside the reports never read.

We were kids born between policies.
The Border Force man spoke to us of laws.
Laws denied us, detained us.
Laws always designed against us.

When he sent out his men and
they had our throats in their hands,
I thought about how
'Boat' came before 'People'
And 'Border' before 'Force'.

This was the message of hope:
We opened it, an empty envelope,
Full of unwritten words:
'We will make sure
You will never have a home.'

Every year we are less human
More popular election-winning lies.
You can rise from the ocean
With blood-coloured wings

Sharks will let you pass – unharmed.
But you will drown in prison camps.

Close your eyes this time,
Let me build you a boat
From my two hands,
A boat that will set you free
From these prison camps.

You will sail to no 'Shore' 'Off' of our hearts;
The road you'll travel from seeking refuge to finding home,
Will not end behind a maximum-security fence;
Home will not be a place in the palm of your hands
Where you hold the tally mark of years –
(Un)lived in prison camps.