

**21<sup>st</sup> December 1916**

By Alison Wassell

Maybe she did her best to love them equally, her first-born, waist deep in trench mud, her second, at sea off Scapa Flow. Maybe she lit candles to guide them home, knitted them socks by the fire as the little ones sang carols in sweet falsettos. Maybe she shuddered as the candles guttered, set down her needles, heard in her head the clanging of the bell, the ‘abandon ship’ command, the cry, ‘Mam, Mam, help me, Mam.’ Maybe she did a deal then, with some cruel god, sacrificed her second to save her first. Maybe none of this was so.

#

Author bio: Alison Wassell is a writer of short fiction from Merseyside, UK. Her work has been published by Fictive Dream, Does It Have Pockets, Gooseberry Pie, Frazzled Lit, Trash Cat Lit, NFFD, Bath Flash Fiction Award, FlashFlood Journal and elsewhere. She was Highly Commended in the 2024 Bridport Prize for Flash Fiction and has twice been nominated for Best Small Fictions. Twitter/X: @lilysslave Bluesky: @alisonwassell.bsky.social