

The Heart of Lewis (The Wreck of the Iolaire, January 1, 1919)

by Janie Meneely and Rob van Sante (c. 2017)

The quay at Kyle was swarming,
All the trains had come and gone
With servicemen returning
And New Year's coming on
They sent a boat from Lewis
So's to bring us home again
They crammed us on like salted beef
Near' three hundred men

CHORUS:

But the sea did what the war could not
That wild and wicked night
The Iolaire broke up on the rocks
And the heart of Lewis died.
The heart of Lewis died

Someone played a lively tune
Others watched the clocks
The captain in his cabin
When the ship went on the rocks
Every man then for himself
With land so close in sight
Could only swim and pray
That God was there that night

CHORUS

[For the sea . . .]

I don't know how they managed
But they got a line to land
Some held fast and struggled
Each going hand-to-hand
Before they even reached the shore
Some were swept away
I grit my teeth, I braced myself
I plunged into the waves

BRIDGE

I kicked off my leather boots
Grabbed the cable, made the leap
Hauling through all hellish surf
I finally made the beach
Battered, broken, frozen
And barefoot on the ground
Seventy survivors
Near 200 men had drowned
200 men had drowned

For weeks the grieving families
Searched the wild and rocky shores
Just a few survivors
From the war to end all wars
A generation lost and gone
Dreams dashed into the tide
When the Iolaire went down that night
And the heart of Lewis died

CHORUS:

For the sea did what the war could not
That wild and wicked night
The Iolaire broke up on the rocks
And the heart of Lewis died
Not a shred of moonlight
Not a star left in the sky
Not a god left up in heaven
When the heart of Lewis died
When the heart of Lewis died