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DAVID COOKE

The Leaving Cert

Mislaid for years, I had never seen it
– the certificate they gave you the day
you finished school. Thirteen and biddable,
I doubt you had been much bother at all,
picking up quite easily the basics
prescribed for the life that lay before you.

Beyond the geography of small towns,
fields, and enigmatic hills, among which
your predecessors scratched out a living
or moved away, you'd followed the Master's
travels, his pointer assertive on maps,
his 'memories' a well-intended ploy

when his horizons were limited too,
his learning shaky: a sprinkle of words
in a dying tongue, his high-sounding speech
and wisdom adding weight to his display –
though any time refinement failed, the strap
or a cuff would teach the clowns and dunces.

But there it is for all to see, the sum
of what you needed to know, entangled
in a script you never got the hang of.
A plodder in Irish, your English fine,
you've always been a reader: family
sagas, memoirs, whatever comes your way;

and learned enough doing sums to eke out
the pennies, those tougher days you had to.
Your sewing basic – good enough to patch
and mend – religion still sustains you,
making little fuss when those you'd nurtured
turned their backs and let it wither away.

Never admitting to brains, but smarter
by far than what's suggested on that brief
resumé, what was the spur to frame it
– quiet pride? nostalgia? – when it turned up
again in a box heaving with papers,
clutter, your children's own pleasing reports.

BRIAN STANLEY

Landscape

There were the churches, everywhere,
some spilling into village squares
their blessed parishioners as we
drove through, our Sunday goal not prayer
but under birches by a stream
to picnic in agnostic air.

There were the castles, palaces,
designed to dazzle or repel
assault, subdue the populace,
their portrait faces left to tell
of heritage and haughtiness
until, from boredom, we'd rebel.

There were the parks, the placid ponds
with ducks by daily bread long tamed
and on the many benches, framed
by chestnut trees and swaying fronds,
old women in whose trench-deep lines
were legions of the dead, unnamed.

There were the schools, or there was one
where nothing ended with a smack,
we pledged our flags to unison
as children of ancestral Gauls
and what I studied in the halls
was girls, who maybe now look back.

JOHNNY LONGFELLOW

Like Normal People Do

Ya' ever wanna go someplace?
I mean...jus' disappear.
Leave ev'rythin'. But, leave no trace.
Git your ass out o' here
To somewhere – could be far or near –
Where you're no longer you.
Where you can dwell, year after year,
Like normal people do.

Ya' ever stare at your own face
But still can't see it clear? –
Ya' struggle hard jus' keepin' pace,
While neighbors, they all steer
'Tween college, marriage, an' career,
'Til – somehow coastin' through –
They barbeque, an' drink col' beer
Like normal people do...

Ya' ever think they won that race,
But still, fall prey to fear
Them dreams 'n' rainbows they all chase,
Once gone, won't reappear?
Or, do they jus' choke back each tear
As one beer turns to two,
Findin' it's Hell to persevere
Like normal people do?

Ya' see? You ain't the first to veer
Off course. That much is true.
Or, last to lose all you hol' dear
Like normal people do.

SIHAM KARAMI

Branching

On tangents piercing vertigo,
multilateral wooden flow –
Sky is endless: simply go!

In spurts and sprints, our conversation
trampolines each light sensation,
connectedness in conflagration.

Let's get out of here, go down
to waters where our words can drown.
Let me verb your luscious noun –

From the elephant shall rise
in the groin between the eyes,
ancient skin and newborn flies.

Terror in the pulse of birth
down the channel, through the earth,
fire bursting from the hearth.

Darker music moves the heart
in rolling waves, its rows apart.
Viewed from space, it forms a chart.

The Milky Way reveals a tree
on which we map its will to be
in reply to "Where are we?"

Trajectories that heave and sway,
gypsy paths and trunks in clay –
illusions of go and stay.

MATT QUINN

Basking Ode

I wish I were a basking shark,
oh how I'd love to bask,
I'd stretch out in the basking park –
you wouldn't have to ask.

But I can't be a shark that basks,
yet basking looks such fun!
What if I wore my basking mask?
Perhaps I'd pass for one?

I'd dive down to the deep and dark
with lunchbox and a flask,
and dressed up like a basking shark,
I'd get to work and bask.

Yet if I were a basking shark,
if basking were my task,
I'd still go basking for a lark.
I do so love to bask.

LOIS WILLIAMS

Salt Lick

Like chunks of marble sitting in the grass,
a monument, it seems not to dissolve,
becomes at dusk a boulder cattle pass
heading to sheds and straw, and some to calve.
A stillborn makes me think the dead will come
with chisels. But it is the cows, their too
much taste for mineral, that nudge and smooth
a ghost face in the salt with solid tongues.

ANDREW PIDOUX

Flower Myth

Paul Klee, 1918

Did you know that there were trees
on the moon? Conifers mostly,
they reach up like furred knees
and look brilliantly ghostly
when you're brushing through them
on the back of your bird, your costly
set of feathers. It's such a gem,
the moon, one of the diamonds
of space that gods can't condemn
nor spoil with mirth. Its giant fronds
can be used as launching pads
for witches who've lost their wands,
while intergalactic cads
can frolic in its crimson sky, float
messages to their Earth-based dads
and find a myriad ways to gloat
to old girlfriends. The moon's like that –
a sort of symbol-filled boat.

ANN KEITH

Sonnet: The Swiftest Way

Overcast skies outside and drizzly rain.
Today the sun has entered Scorpio.
Upon the hearth the incandescent glow
Of embers flashing suddenly into flame.

Perpetual approach. A winding chain
Of linked uninterrupted ceaseless slow
Spirals ascending upwards from below.
Progress from phase to phase, from plane to plane.

But what is this to one who night and day
Thirsts for the most direct and swiftest way
To reach beyond the circling universe
That goal above which there is no above –
In one inspired and burning flight traverse
All planes and stages to be drowned in love.

JEAN L. KREILING

To an Abandoned Euphonium Case

for Don

You once held yards of shiny looping brass
along with breath-defying aspirations
to play somewhere besides the halftime grass –
but no Wagnerian reverberations
attest to the fulfillment of such dreams.
Instead, a whiff of Sousa-weary sweat
infests your once-plush lining, where extremes
of still-bright red and moldy black have met,
naïve ambition stalked by time and weather
within a rotting shell that cannot say
why instrument and case are not together,
or if there's anything still left to play.
It's obvious that you don't know the score;
you'll soon be tossed out, noteworthy no more.

ANNA EVANS

Trojan Sonnet

Your gates swing open and you wheel it in,
this sturdy figure patterned by my breath.
Its artless message is: *okay, you win –
I'm going home. I cannot fight till death
to make you love me. Keep your blasted city.
It turns out that the walls were far too high.
Although its secret gardens may be pretty,
for sanity I have to say goodbye.*

Yet during the first night that we're apart,
as you forgive a dream its easy kiss,
the wooden shell will split and from its heart
my hidden words will pour. I've told them this:
*Creep right past all his guards. The job's to force
complete surrender. Then burn down the horse.*

KIM BRIDGFORD

Loose

For ten years, girls were locked inside the house.
The world went on outside, as if to say,
You do not matter: he is on the loose.

Each day, he left them there, and drove the bus.
His neighbors thought it strange, each lock and key.
For ten years, girls were locked inside the house.

It's always a surprise. Yet Cruelty's noose
Tightens on young women every day:
You do not matter; you will not get loose.

Blame it on her skirt, or low-cut blouse.
Once she's inside, she will be forced to stay.
For ten years, girls were locked inside the house.

What can he say, except what is outrageous?
The ropes? The chains? The dog collars? *You fray.*
Disintegrate. And, then, you matter less.

Society always has a quick excuse.
Yet Cruelty is not just what we see.
For ten years, girls were locked inside the house.
They only mattered when they were set loose.

MARCUS BALES

Tracks

The freezer hums its lowest notes
the refrigerator too;
the furnace rumbles, hot air floats
in over covers askew.

A failing neon bulb descants
above the feral cats'
busy tenors, thumps, and pants,
blinking 'Parts' then 'Pats'.

My keyboard's intermittent ticks,
intimately slight,
add their small percussive licks
in rhythm with the night.

It only needs a bluesy love
song on a saxophone
to blend in with the memories of
last night's delicious moan.

Besottedly I hum and blow
and buzz and wah and coo
through every love song that I know
in love, in love, with you.

CONTRIBUTORS

David Cooke was born in the UK but his family comes from the West of Ireland. He won a Gregory Award in 1977. His retrospective collection, *In the Distance*, was published in 2011 by Night Publishing. A new collection, *Work Horses*, was published by Ward Wood in 2012. His poems, translations and reviews have appeared widely in the UK, Ireland and beyond in journals such as *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *The Bow Wow Shop*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The Irish Press*, *The London Magazine*, *Magma*, *The Morning Star*, *New Walk*, *The North*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Reader*, *The SHOp* and *Stand*. He has two collections forthcoming: *A Murmuration* (Two Rivers Press, 2015) and *After Hours* (Cultured Llama Press 2017).

Brian Stanley was born in Madrid and educated in French until high school. A longtime translator, he lives in the Eastern Townships of Quebec.

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Siham Karami co-owns a technology recycling company and lives in Florida. Her poetry appears or will appear in *The Comstock Review*, *Measure*, *Unsplendid*, *Möbius*, *String Poet*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Angle Poetry*, *Kin Poetry Journal*, *Wordgathering*, *Amsterdam Quarterly Review*, *Snakeskin*, *Raintown Review*, *The Lavender Review*, *Atavic Poetry*, *Innisfree Journal*, and the anthology *Irresistible Sonnets*, among other places. She won a Laureates' Choice prize in the Maria W. Faust sonnet contest and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Matt Quinn lives in Brighton, England and hopes to one day have a sufficiently impressive list of poetry publications to justify a biography.

Lois Williams lives on the Wash coast in Norfolk, England and works with

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Anna M. Evans' poems have appeared in the *Harvard Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, *American Arts Quarterly*, and *32 Poems*. She gained her MFA from Bennington College, and is the Editor of the *Raintown Review*. Recipient of Fellowships from the MacDowell Artists' Colony and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and winner of the 2012 Rattle Poetry Prize Readers' Choice Award, she currently teaches at West Windsor Art Center and Richard Stockton College of NJ. Her new sonnet collection, *Sisters & Courtesans*, is forthcoming from White Violet Press. Visit her online at annamevans.com.

Kim Bridgford is the director of Poetry by the Sea: A Global Conference. She is the past director of the West Chester University Poetry Center and the West Chester University Poetry Conference, the largest all-poetry writing

conference in the United States. As the editor of *Mezzo Cammin*, she founded The *Mezzo Cammin* Women Poets Timeline Project, which was launched at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington in March 2010. Her collaborative work with the visual artist Jo Yarrington has been honored with a Ucross fellowship. Bridgford is the author of eight books of poetry, including *Bully Pulpit*, *Epiphanies*, and *Doll*. She has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Connecticut Post*, on NPR and the website of *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, and in various headline news outlets.

Not much is known about **Marcus Bales** except he lives in Cleveland, Ohio, and his poems have not appeared in *Poetry* or *The New Yorker*.