

# **Féile Luimnigh 2020.**

## **Poems for Senior Section of Competition.**

Compiled by Anna Walker.

### **SVG13. (Born 2007)**

#### **Night Writing,**

By Carol Ann Duffy.

Only a neat margin of moonlight  
There at the curtains' edge.  
The room like a dark page.  
I lie in bed.  
Silence is ink.  
The sound of my breath dips in  
And out. So I begin  
Night writing. The stars type themselves  
Far out in space.  
Who would guess  
To look at my sleeping face  
The rhymes and tall tales I invent?  
Here be dragons; children lost  
In the wood; three wishes; the wicked  
And the good.  
Read my lips.  
The small hours are poems.  
Dawn is a rubber.

## **Forbidden Poem,**

By Tony Mitton.

This poem is not for children.

Keep out!

There is a big oak door

In front of this poem.

It's locked.

And on the door is a notice

In big red letters.

It says: any child who enters here

Will never be the same again.

WARNING. KEEP OUT.

But what's this?

A key in the keyhole.

And what's more

Nobody's about.

'Go on, look,'

Says a little voice

Inside your head.

'surely a poem

Cannot strike you dead?'

You turn the key.

The door swings wide.

And then you witness

What's inside.

And from that day

You'll try in vain.

You'll never be the same again.

## **SVB13. (Born 2007).**

### **Entering a Castle,**

By Brian Moses.

Don't enter a castle quietly  
Or timidly.  
Don't enter it anxiously,  
Ready to bolt  
At the slightest sound.  
Don't enter it stealthily  
Taking slow and thoughtful steps,  
Considering with each footfall  
The mystery of history.  
Don't be meek  
Or frightened to speak.  
For when you enter a castle  
You should CHARGE through the gate  
And signal your arrival with a SHOUT!  
You should play the invading army  
And barge a way through.  
You should Swagger up to the door  
Then Shove it aside and announce,  
'Here I am! This is mine!'

This castle is here, it is waiting for you,  
And today,  
It is yours for the taking!

## **A helicopter. Maybe,**

By James Carter.

It's getting dark  
And we're walking  
down the hill  
Past the park  
And you point  
At the sky  
And you say,  
'Hey. What's that?'

'What? What's what?  
I say and  
Then I see  
A little craft  
With rows of  
Coloured flashing lights  
Whizzing slowly across  
The night sky.

It hovers a while  
Then gradually returns  
Back to where  
It came from.

'Wow! I say  
'UFO!'  
You go quiet.

Without a word  
You dash off  
Down the hill  
All the way  
To your house.

We never talk  
About it again.

What was It?

## SVG14. (Born 2006)

**Today,**

By Billy Collins.

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,  
So uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

That it made you want to throw  
Open all the windows in the house

And unlatch the door to the canary's cage,  
Indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,

A day when the cool brick paths  
And the garden sprouting tulips

Seemed so etched in sunlight  
That you felt like taking

A hammer to the glass paperweight  
On the living room end table,

Releasing the inhabitants  
From their snow-covered cottage

So they could walk out,  
Holding hands and squinting

Into this larger dome of blue and white,  
Well, today is just that kind of day.

## Ring Home,

By Philip Gross.

She's come so far, what can she say?  
She's punched her last coin in.  
There's a pinball flicker  
of connections, then the ansafone:

her mother, the voice  
of her whole life so far  
sounding cramped in that little  
black box, speaking slow

as a hostage in the judder  
of a ransom video. *Please*  
*leave your name and your number.*  
*Speak after the tone.*

She can't find the words to explain  
To a ghost in a machine  
A hundred miles away  
In the hall in the house that was home.

## **SVB 14 (Born 2006)**

### **Mother to Son,**

By Langston Hughes.

Well, Son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it.  
And splinters.  
And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor –  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I've been a-climbin' on.  
And reachin' landin's.  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard  
Don't you fall now –  
For I've still goin', honey.  
I've still climbin'.  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

## **Conquer,**

By Joseph Coelho.

Five children clasping mittens  
Could not hug the entire trunk.  
Whole hands could hide in the folds of its bark.  
James, the tallest boy in the class,  
Could sit on a root,  
His feet would not touch the ground.

Every classroom faced the playground,  
Every child could see the tree.  
Leaves beckoning.  
Conkers swelling.

As the bells rang  
We'd march to the tree,  
Sticks in hand,  
Eyes fixed on the mace-like horse chestnuts.  
Green spikes hungry to prick  
Our minds obsessed with the jewels within.

## **SV15 (Born 2005)**

### **Last Requests,**

By Michael Longley.

Your batman thought you were buried alive,  
Left you for dead and stole your pocket watch  
And cigarette case, all he could salvage  
From the grave you so nearly had to share  
With an unexploded shell. But your lungs  
Surfaced to take a long remembered drag.  
Heart contradicting as an epitaph  
The two initials you had scratched on gold.

I thought you blew a kiss before you died,  
But the bony fingers that waved to and fro  
Were asking for a Woodbine, the last request  
Of many soldiers in your company,  
The brand you chose to smoke for forty years  
Thoughtfully, each one like a sacrament.  
I who brought peppermints and grapes only  
Couldn't reach you through the oxygen tent.

## **Introduction to Poetry,**

By Billy Collins.

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

## SV 16. (Born 2004)

### Long Distance 11,

By Tony Harrison.

Though my mother was already two years dead  
Dad kept her slippers warming by the gas,  
Put hot water bottles her side of the bed  
And still went to renew her transport pass.

You couldn't just drop in. You had to phone.  
He'd put you off an hour to give him time  
To clear away her things and look alone  
As though his still raw love were such a crime.

He couldn't risk my blight of disbelief  
Though sure that very soon he'd hear her key  
Scrape in the rusted lock and end his grief.  
He *knew* she'd just popped out to get the tea.

I believe life ends with death, and that is all.  
You haven't both gone shopping; just the same,  
In my new black leather phone book, there's your name  
And the disconnected number I still call.

## **Postscript**

By Seamus Heaney.

And some time make the time to drive out west  
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy shore,  
In September or October, when the wind  
And the light are working off each other  
So that the ocean on one side is wild  
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones  
The surface of a slate-grey lake is fit  
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,  
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,  
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads  
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.  
Useless to think you'll park and capture it  
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,  
A hurry through which known and strange things pass  
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways  
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

## SV18 (Born 2002/3)

### Shutting the Gate,

By Helen Dunmore.

A barefoot girl hugs the wall  
On tiptoe, her instep  
Arched like a cat's back.  
Nearby a car revs.  
She looks at me and smiles  
Like a primary-school child.  
Her friend smokes by the gate  
One hand on the wall.  
Lissom as lilies, they shake dark curls  
And watch the car.

I say: Are you girl's all right?  
And she says: We don't like  
The look of them. Two men  
In the dark of the car, also smoking.  
She swings the gate shut.  
They might be my daughters –  
A little older, I reckon –  
But those men don't look  
Much like the sons of anyone.

It's late, almost two a.m.  
They are both inside the gate  
With one shoe-strap broken  
A packet of cigarettes  
Brief lovely dresses.  
I ask: Will you be all right?  
They don't want to come inside,  
They just didn't like the gate open  
When those men were waiting  
Like that, with the engine going  
And from time to time a rev  
So we don't forget.

## **The Great Blasket Island,**

By Julie O'Callaghan.

Six men born on this island  
Have come back after twenty-one years.  
They climb up the overgrown roads  
To their family houses  
And come out shaking their heads.  
The roofs have fallen in  
And birds have nested in the rafters.  
All the white-washed rooms  
All the nagging and praying  
And scolding and giggling  
And crying and gossiping  
Are scattered in the memories of these men.  
One says, 'Ten of us, blown to the winds –  
Some in England, some in America, some in Dublin.  
Our whole way of life – extinct.'  
He blinks back the tears  
And looks across the island  
Past the ruined houses, the cliffs  
And out to the horizon.

Listen, mister, most of us cry sooner or later  
Over a Great Blasket Island of our own.

## **SVAD (Born 2001 or earlier.)**

### **Christmas,**

By Leonard Clark.

I had almost forgotten the singing in the streets,  
Snow piled up by the houses, drifting  
Underneath the door into the warm room,  
Firelight, lamplight, the little lame cat  
Dreaming in soft sleep on the hearth, mother dozing,  
Waiting for Christmas to come, the boys and me  
Trudging over blanket fields waving lanterns to the sky.  
I had almost forgotten the smell, the feel of it all,  
The coming back home, with girls laughing like stars,  
Their cheeks, holly berries, me kissing one,  
Silent-tongued, soberly, by the long church wall;  
Then back to the kitchen table, supper on the white cloth,  
Cheese, bread, the home-made wine;  
Symbols of the nights joy, a holy feast.  
And I wonder now, years gone, mother gone,  
The boys and girls scattered, drifted away with the snowflakes,  
Lamplight done, firelight over,  
If the sounds of our singing in the streets are still there,  
Those old tunes, still praising:  
And now, a life time of Decembers away from it all,  
A branch of remembering holly spears my cheeks,  
And I think it may be so;  
Yes, I believe it may be so.

## **Begin,**

By Brendan Kennelly.

Begin again to the summoning birds  
To the sight of the light at the window,  
Begin to the roar of morning traffic  
All along Pembroke Road.  
Every beginning is a promise  
Born in light and dying in dark  
Determination and exaltation of springtime  
Flowering the way to work.  
Begin to the pageant of queuing girls  
The arrogant loneliness of swans in the canal  
Bridges linking the past and future  
Old friends passing though with us still.  
Begin to the loneliness that cannot end  
Since it perhaps is what makes us begin,  
Begin to wonder at unknown faces  
At crying birds in the sudden rain  
At branches stark in the willing sunlight  
At seagulls foraging for bread  
At couples sharing a sunny secret  
Alone together while making good.  
Though we live in a world that dreams of ending  
That always seems about to give in  
Something that will not acknowledge conclusion  
Insists that we forever begin.