

## THE O'CAROLAN CUP 12-14 Years

### Mid-Term Break

By Seamus Heaney

I sat all morning in the college sick bay  
Counting bells knelling classes to a close.  
At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying—  
He had always taken funerals in his stride—  
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram  
When I came in, and I was embarrassed  
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'.  
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,  
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.  
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived  
With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops  
And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him  
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,  
He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot.  
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four-foot box, a foot for every year.

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### **An Old Woman of the Roads**

by Pádraic Colum

O, to have a little house!  
To own the hearth and stool and all!  
The heaped up sods upon the fire,  
The pile of turf against the wall!  
To have a clock with weights and chains  
And pendulum swinging up and down!  
A dresser filled with shining delph,  
Speckled and white and blue and brown!  
I could be busy all the day  
Clearing and sweeping hearth and floor,  
And fixing on their shelf again  
My white and blue and speckled store!  
I could be quiet there at night  
Beside the fire and by myself,  
Sure of a bed and loth to leave  
The ticking clock and the shining delph!  
Och! but I'm weary of mist and dark,  
And roads where there's never a house nor bush,  
And tired I am of bog and road,  
And the crying wind and the lonesome hush!  
And I am praying to God on high,  
And I am praying Him night and day,  
For a little house - house of my own -  
Out of the wind's and the rain's way.

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### Moments When the Light

By Brendan Kennelly

There are moments when the light  
Makes me start up, fright  
In my heart as if I feared to see  
Unbearable clarity about me.  
Once, on Portobello Bridge,  
I had the sudden privilege  
Of seeing light leap from the sky  
About five o'clock on an autumn day,  
Defining every visible thing,  
Unseen by one among the moving throng;  
Road, bridge, factory, canal,  
Stained swans and filthy reeds, all  
The set homegoing faces  
Filling motorcars and buses;  
Then I knew that energy is but  
Unconsciousness; if moving men could  
See where they are going, they would  
Stop and contemplate the light  
And never move again until  
They understood why it should spill  
A sudden benediction on  
The head of every homegoing man.  
But no one looked or saw the way  
The waters danced for the visiting light  
Or how green foliage glittered. It  
Was ignored completely.  
I knew the world is most at ease  
With acceptable insanities,  
Important nothings that command  
The heart and mind of busy men  
Who, had they seen it, might have praised  
The light on Portobello Bridge.  
But then, light broke. I looked. An evening glow.  
Men go home because they do not know.