

# MOORINGS

poetry

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*As always, for Oonagh  
and in memory of Kieran Egan*

## Lost and Found: A Sequence

### 1

A single sock, bus tickets, a quarter  
swaddled in lint in a back pocket,  
a rosary of phone calls that peters out  
in sorry apologies, treks to a dusty office  
in airport or concert hall—forget the trivia  
and troves of things not so easily  
replaced—prescription glasses, watches,  
credit cards, even a wedding ring.  
There's no end to what is lost. Focus instead  
on a best friend struck down in his prime,  
a lost chance of making good on a promise,  
a love that did not work out.  
Above all, know when to give up.

### 2

Mudlarks scour the City's riverbanks, hoping to find  
discarded coins, Roman amphorae, pottery shards  
as if to establish continuity. Once hit-and-miss,  
nowadays radar and metal detectors make  
tracking things easier—finders keepers,  
not only treasure, also  
hidden mass graves, missing persons,  
alternate histories.

### 3

After the loss of life, a jury's findings  
or a cenotaph, mass remembrance  
or the profit and loss, there's the collateral damage  
of sweatshops, factories  
that furnish our plenitude

beside dark streams in lands  
 we never think of and have not visited,  
 corpses covered up by a balance sheet.

## 4

Old age makes room for loss, the price of survival.  
 What anesthesia for best friends dying too soon  
 and too far away? The scars, the wounds persist.  
 And sometimes lost friends are found again by chance,  
 surfacing after fifty years. (But what shall I do  
 with my love for a whole country that no longer exists?)

## 5

The chiropractor adjusts my neck and spine  
 to release built up tensions, the psychiatrist  
 wants me to let go of suicidal grief.  
 Likewise, insurance agents calculate loss,  
 put a dollar value on a child's life.  
 We settle, come to terms,  
 try despite failing eyes to see things in perspective.

## 6

Though I once had  
 a photographic memory,  
 those negatives are lost  
 and will not develop in  
 the dark room of the future.  
 With language it's the same:  
 halfway through a conversation,  
 I am lost for words, lose the thread, hear  
 the whole story unravel.  
 With time, language disintegrates,  
 not just the words themselves

10

are lost to dementia, the power  
of speech is taken over  
by corporate empires, unique  
ways of feeling lost  
as languages disappear.

7

The same with friends, after a while  
with Christmas letters, phone calls unanswered,  
I learn to suspect the worst.  
But to remove their names  
from diaries and calendars  
can bring no resolution, no closure.

8

At a loss, briefly we find ourselves  
in things noticed in passing.  
So many times we are taken  
out of ourselves, stumble upon  
an organist practicing  
at dusk in an empty chapel,  
the slant of sunlight thwarted by cloud,  
the evening stillness of reeds  
at attention by the river's edge;  
wind-flickered wild yellow poppies,  
peripheral, by the roadside,  
in a meadow a single voice  
singing but unaware  
of any listeners. This is our reward  
for what will endure, what is given.

## Ordnance Survey

Obsolete now except as collectibles, thanks to  
Google Earth's 24-7 intrusion  
into our streets and gardens.

Nothing is strange anymore; we are all Peeping Toms  
in the furthest corners of New Zealand or Equador.

Though these maps in my childhood, one inch to the mile,  
seemed to reveal everything—  
chapels, streams, level crossings, footpaths, churches with spires—  
they still left us space to explore on foot, to feel our own way.

On kitchen tables before setting out, I imagined contours,  
saw a cliff face rear up, pictured the farm by the marsh.  
And they were durable: tucked into our rucksacks  
along with a picnic lunch and a compass, even when folded  
they did not fray. They gave us connection,  
security and scale. It was a tangible world.

## Insects

An avid gardener, my father was firm on some things, like  
“Centipedes good, millipedes bad.” I took his word for it  
and became a righteous god for woodlouse and cockroach.  
Now when I read  
of half a million insect species at risk of extinction  
in the coming decades because of climate change,  
pesticides, destruction of habitat,  
I can’t play favourites anymore—snow leopards, polar bears—  
or bemoan the dearth of monarch butterflies  
while scorning hyenas and hagfish.  
There are no bad animals, so reluctantly I am  
learning to suffer even the most obnoxious  
of insects, mosquitoes, hornets, a plethora  
of tiny creatures, almost invisible  
or like maggots, scrolling cadavers,  
ugly crawlers I would once happily  
have squashed underfoot, I finally see their place  
in the whole great scheme of things,  
how it connects, how they all have work to do  
in wetlands, wilderness, desert  
as prey or predator, sustaining a commonwealth.

## Marmalade

A childhood ritual. Handling the cut fruit,  
extracting pips, slicing boiled peel in thick wedges,  
my mother, alchemist, hovers  
over a seething cauldron to transform  
magma of Seville oranges, brown sugar, pith  
into a chloroform sweetness  
that mists the kitchen windows.

An hour or so later she conjures the residue  
into a tempered bitterness, drains off the ooze  
in clamped mason jars while I with a wooden spoon  
cannot wait, dredge heavy steel saucepans  
for vestiges of fruit.