

## Catching up

I recognise your face  
though it's more drawn,  
your top lip stretched  
taut across your teeth, yet  
there are creases in your skin.  
It's a bit of a shock. I'm thinking  
how much you've aged - and  
how uncertain you've become.  
But I get used to it,  
then this is who you were  
and who you are –  
in all the music of  
your shifts and changes.

Come to think of it,  
though I didn't at the time,  
this, I suppose, is  
what it was like for you –  
how long I wonder  
before you got past the shock  
of white hair I'd forgotten that I had,  
the corrugations on my lips  
like disapproval, though it isn't –  
how long before you  
saw beyond the memory,  
got used to it,  
and heard the music.

## Gift (after Dorothy Nimmo)

I'd like to give you quiet ease,  
that such a peace  
might calm away your pains and aches,  
all the hurting you face.  
I'd like to give you space to stay gentle  
when you're turning round in circles,  
to soothe away your need for control,  
which is growing as we grow old.  
I'd like to give you my health,  
promise you need never fear my death.  
But then, I'd like this for me -  
so hard, this impossibility.

## THE PK POETS

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## ABOUT MARIA NORTH

Maria North was born in Lincolnshire, spent far too many years in London, and escaped back to Lincolnshire in 2017. She has always loved writing, and is currently a member of the Lincoln Library Writing Group

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# THE PK POETS SECOND SERIES

## #13 Maria North



## **My Very First School Photograph**

They line us up in rows  
and sit me next to Linda  
cross-legged at the front.  
She's got a silly big pink bow in her hair.  
The boys all scowling  
in their little shorts.  
The raggy Dunwell twins with  
mischief in their eyes

Auntie Winnie likes to knit.  
My cardigan has tidy little squares.  
On each one, in a different colour wool,  
a daisy. I feel stupid but  
Mam made me wear it.  
So I sit there, in my daisies  
and the photo man attempts a little quip.  
*Someone's Mother has been busy.*  
I wince and there's a flash  
so on the photograph my mouth  
is sort of twisted up one side  
while Linda smiles her big beribboned smile

## **The old suitcase**

A battered old thing in the debris  
of leftovers from a life well worn.  
Undo the clasps with care, and with  
respect for clues and secrets held inside.  
Handle it gently, this smartly folded dress suit  
smelling of must and mothballs.  
Stroke the silken lapels. Lay it to one side  
with reverence. Then hesitate.  
Will you pick those up - that bundle of letters  
ribboned in red? Intrude on this private world?  
Of course you will - like a raider of sacred tombs  
you plunder them, read the messages  
(so personal, those pet names) that speak of  
everlasting love and then apologise -  
she meant it at the time.  
Bundle it up again, this thwarted life,  
tie it tenderly in red, and weep.

## **Frozen**

Spiderweb on the windowpane  
a frozen Eiffel Tower.  
Skating rink on the birdbath,  
white glaze on the grass and on the path.  
Sun frozen white in a flat grey sky.

Bonechilled, shoulders hunched into my neck.  
Even warm clothes and central heating  
just don't cut it. I wouldn't be  
the bird who trembles in the hedge  
the animal shivering in the field  
the homeless man huddled in the doorway.  
Will any of them survive?  
Is the spider still alive?

## **Great Grandmother's lament**

A lifetime ago  
I might've been able to cherish  
this tiny child  
This child of the child of my child

A lifetime ago  
I might've wanted to embrace him  
even coo  
but I am weary.  
Fed up of all this new birth  
Can't be bothered  
I've had mine

## **Fast Food**

Eat eat eat feast fast stuff it down don't  
taste don't think don't feel don't stop don't  
listen to your body when it says it's had  
enough keep going keep going with the  
automatic arm keep shovelling shovelling  
shove it in shove it in even when it hurts  
keep going keep going there's still  
some left eat it all til it's gone  
did you like it?  
dunno

## **Laburnia**

I'm fifteen, well - nearly sixteen,  
passing for twenty one.  
Main event at home?  
They've papered the walls.  
Dangly yellow laburnums -  
you'd think they were dripping gold -  
sit back to back with the swirls of puny daisies  
that grace the walls of snooty number ten.

We knock it back at the weekends,  
me and the gang -  
cheap cider from the corner shop,  
no questions asked.  
Golden sweetness.  
We swig it straight from the bottle  
with a swagger of we can take it.  
Well we can.

Except I haven't managed it tonight.  
I lurch through the doorway, feigning nonchalance  
as I watch the blur of laburnums  
reel up towards the ceiling, up and away -  
like credits rolling past at the end of a film  
too fast for me to read.  
I'm going to bed, I slur,  
and stumble up the stairs.

## **The park in lockdown**

Swings, a slide, a roundabout  
a metal seesaw with a funny hump,  
familiar/unfamiliar  
sitting side by side, deserted.

It's as if there's been a murder.  
Plastic tape, red/white red/white,  
wraps round each ride,  
tells children to keep off.

A solitary kid is playing  
football on the netball pitch.  
We sit and hear the birdsong,  
and the bored bouncing ball.