

# THE QUARRY

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**Life As We Know It:  
A Collection Of Poems**

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Forgive us children  
for we know not what we do.  
It has been three years  
since our last confession.

Snaking across cracks in the tarmac,  
up three steps, past the bag hooks  
lining brick walls outside classrooms,  
past high windows barring the world.

Past the first double door  
into the assembly room.  
A door guard, bespectacled and  
graciously condescending,  
grants access to the long table.  
A name is checked and  
papers handed over.

Democracy, first-world style:  
This is the farce  
to bring the nation out to play.  
Compelled participation, pointless  
if on one day in a thousand.  
The real players not on the ballot.

We've seen democracy elsewhere  
and fear the barbarism;  
opposition candidates and  
sealed ballot boxes  
sequestered in shallow graves.  
Dawn raids and road blocks  
keep the living from voting,  
whilst legions rise  
from the dead like Lazarus.

We park on clipped verges,  
queue in safe corridors,  
to cast our empty votes,  
then meet up for a latte.

Back home, the back pat done,  
we rid ourselves of public germs  
in matching basins, his and hers,  
and rinse away  
the crimson stain of apathy.

The lives we end,  
we do not see on tally boards.  
The deaths we sanction  
are not real to us; the blood not red.

The anguish not visible,  
broadcast in tunnel vision  
on our expansive plasma screens.

*Don't look!*

We warn our children  
when another revolution  
flickers unannounced  
across a tennis-white wall.

We plan their future,  
their reactions.

Predictably,  
they braille their way  
to the cartoon channel.

## Bridge

Silver-webbed suspension bridge  
spans plenty of nothing and plenty of me.

My father worked here – a road builder to this day.  
A bright young engineer in wide trouser legs,  
drawing complex arches.  
Planning for the future.

When we were little he told us:  
*The man who designed this killed himself right here.*  
Since then all bridges spill  
silent tumbling bodies  
free-falling in stop motion.

Here's my father as a student, as I never knew him.  
1945, yet more than safe, from the horror abroad.  
Carefree and smiling on the steps of the residence.  
Young men in rugby shorts squint and smoke and laugh.

The one on the left died in 1980.  
His second wife locked him out;  
phoned his children: *Come get your dad.*  
No joke, my dad said – we didn't laugh.

My father's best friend, carefree. That's him,  
sprawled on his back blowing smoke rings.  
He windsurfed, travelled the world.  
The last time I saw him, in his eighties,  
he still laughed just like that.

My father became serious, did well for himself.  
He never came to concerts. My winning song:  
*Tu m'echappes toujours*. You always escape me.  
No joke – I didn't laugh.

Yesterday I gave him  
a picture book on bridges.  
Silver-haired body tumbles,  
free-falling in stop motion –  
leaves nothing for me.

## **Emptiness**

Turned myself inside out  
searched the seams for  
loose threads of  
sympathy  
empathy  
telepathy  
psychopathy

no ticket stubs to  
Beethoven's ninth  
no waxy gum wrappers  
peddling humour  
no man-size tissues  
for tears of joy  
not even a paper clip  
to bend into a heart

no scraps of paper  
boasting conquests  
no Lotto ticket  
bearing hope  
no tubes of chapstick  
oozing promise  
no safety pins  
as this is all but safe

just emptiness

a pushchair  
without infant  
not even a lamb  
to offer in your place.