



Five Poems

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Introduction Note

Men – particularly Irish men – are notoriously bad at telling one another they love each other. For this reason, I am frightened yet proud to be introducing five love poems to various men in my life. One for a friend, one for a professor, one for my father, one for my uncle, and one for my landlord.

In a cultural context obsessed with terms like “the manosphere” and “male loneliness epidemic”, oftentimes we can forget that most men still have good hearts. Many men find it difficult (even awkward) to relate to one another, particularly in later years. While others meet for tapas dinners and mimosa brunches, we tend to prefer the uncomplicated bonding experience of sport. It’s easier for us to play-fight than hug; to make eye contact with our pints instead of each other. It could be said that this image of an Irish male fumbling for the words beyond his reach is a cliché. But there’s at least a little truth to every stereotype.

Thankfully, there is still the defining light of poetry to reveal what sometimes cannot be expressed overtly. I state this in the comfortable knowledge that none of my mused men will likely ever seek out or read these works. The fact that they have been written (and now witnessed by you, dear reader) has clarified the importance they play in my life. These men are rendered here, I hope, in the way I long to keep them: as Heaney says, “perfected in my memory”.

It was either this or five-a-side...and I’m hopeless at football!

Luke Morgan

“Long Way Round”

The world never seemed so possible as it did
when Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman
rode their dirt track motorbikes
from traffic-lit London to GoPro-shuddering Mongolia,
beamed into the living room where we watched
with our Dad, who promised us how,
one day, we *three amigos* would set out
like they had, take on the open sky,
eat a sheep testicle or two, pitch tents
and sleep in defiance of stars.

On the weekends he had us,
we huddled round with cups of tea,
biscuit crumbs spelling a trail on our chests,
to join boyish Ewan and Charlie,
confront a mosquito bump on a forehead,
dab diesel from an eyeball, encounter
a glacier, alien-blue, in Anchorage.

Little did we know then, as SUVs got pulled
out of rapids where the Road of Bones
turned to rivers in Magadan,
and we fell asleep under the sparkle
of each episode's credits, how
he'd hoist us over each shoulder
and carry us up the stairs, leaving
before we woke the next morning
to begin his long meandering journey
back to us again.

“Tritina for Jim Rogers”

For one unusually warm October afternoon
on one of Minnesota's 10'000 lakes,
the retired professor Jim Rogers was all mine.

As he recalled Mayo roots, this “Davitt blood of mine”,
I steered our flimsy canoe. I was in the afternoon
of my prime, but at 72, he was the lake's

true disprover – he did not dwell on the lakes
he'd fallen into, just shared his time with mine.
Though my paddle rowed us both all afternoon,

the lake's ripples that afternoon were his, not mine.

“Two Months to Go”

for Ryan

Two months to go
and you're paying close attention
to the construction of things:
a hotel wall isn't grouted properly,
the cables of a townhouse are exposed,
a foam board ceiling is clot-marked with damp.

You fret that you aren't capable
but I've watched you smooth a wooden beam
across setting concrete, careful as caressing a forehead.
In the mornings, you layer words
on top of one another, re-draft ideas
like tucking live-wires crusted with plaster dust.

Two months to go
and while you can only view your graft
moments you stop to lean on a shovel,
your engineering partner sees it all
as the scaffolding falls on your newest project;
the one who's grown feet and a heart

and will always hold
the meticulous angles
of the ones who built her.

“Banjo”

My landlord's learning to play the banjo.
The silence of my ceiling – his floor –
is now finger-plucked
with a failing confidence.

I prefer the banjo to Willow,
his yappy cocker spaniel,
the only female company
either of us had in forever.

A year ago, I met him searching
for her along the bohareen.
He was so nervous to tell me
he had to increase my rent,

I found myself finishing his sentences.
This Christmas, he left eye contact
in the kitchen, showed up at my door.
He thrust a crumpled 50 into my hand,
mumbled, "Buy yourself something nice."

I returned his money to him
as a framed photograph of Willow.
"Arrah what'd you go doing that for."
The closest he got to affection
that stormy season.

Tonight again, I hear the banjo
struggling through the cold walls.
I send my heart up halfway to meet him
as he wills that reluctant instrument to speak.

"Education"

for David

How to wear tracksuit bottoms to the opera.
How to flood your face with laughter
until the vein in your forehead asserts.
How to dip into the water at Salthill
first thing in the morning, and not brag about it.
How to send back the bad wine,
yet chuckle when it's proven you can't tell
the difference between a 15 and a 90.
How to say, "greetings".
How to cry, and brag about it.
How to get excited about business ventures
you know will probably never happen,
feel the excitement carry you anyways.
How to drink the good wine.
How to switch between debate and craic
like *finger snap* that.
How to get the difficult scalp –
just behind the ear – with a razor.
How to be bald without a beard.
How to get a letter published in the Irish Times
made up of a single pun.
How to forget to boil the kettle
while stewing in grief, make the tea anyways.
How to carry a coffin.

How to say “Clones” like everyone is in
on the joke, until we are.
How to realise the bit in the introduction
where you explain the poem
is often better than the poem itself.
How to count out 580 chocolate raisins.
How to send the email to Oxford
because, feck it, someone has to get in.
How to wonder if university
would have made a difference
without realising you’re the person
others aspire to be.

