

A TEACHER'S LAMENT

It's no' much fun bein' a teacher:
I am a poor downtrodden creature.
Pupils may think I've got some power,
And rule ma class frae nine till fower:
But I can reveal it isna true —
There's aye folk tellin' me whit tae do.
I am a slave, I am not free:
I'm manipulated "by the powers that be.
I seldom smile, I seldom laugh:
I'm terrified o' bein' telt aff.

I stagger in at nine, feelin' tired and shakey;
I look up, and aye, there's Mr Blakey:
And in his hand there's a wee 'please-takey'
And I say Oh criwens no, for goodness sakey!
So, filled wi' sorrow and wi' gloom
I stagger up ta ma own wee room,
And there's the man you canna dodge:
Aye, I'm referring tae Mr Hodge,
And wi' his merry sense o' fun
He reminds me o' things I havna done,
And says that I'll end up in the national headlines
If I don't keep up wi' all his deadlines.

I let the class in. Some books I bring.
And then the telephone starts to ring.
It's a message from the all—powerful headie:
Aye, you've guessed it — Nancy Eadie.
The class just sit there, unconcerned,
While I dash aff tae dae the errand.
Soon I come back. I start once more;
Then there's a knockin' at the door.
It's Mrs Gribben wi' some new lad, or lass,
Tae get allocated tae a class.
That takes a while. My class just sits,
While I have forty different kinds of fits —
At last I start again, and that is when
The damned phone goes and rings again.
It's Eileen McIntyre this time,
Accusin' me o' a dreadful crime:
I've forgotten to send down A4 paper. Please don't scoff:
It means ma exams haven't been run off.
And they're for tomorrow! Instant panic!
Nae wonder I'm sufferin' frae depression manic.
Doon wi' the paper I charge, feelin' like a mug,
The class just look at each other and shrug.
But soon I'm back. 'Let's start ...' I drone —
An' that's the cue for the telephone.
It's Margaret Sommerville, just about ready tae greet
Because I havena filled up her computer sheet.
Forgetfulness is my besetting sin:
Nae wonder paranoia's settin' in.
After ten minutes o' toil depressin'
I'm ready again tae start the lesson.

Then the door opens, and in some kid potters:
'I've been sent along for a packet o' jotters. '
I deal wi' that, and count tae ten —
Then its the telephone again!

It's Mr Smith the dentist -- well, well, well!
I've tae send down Joe Bloggs frae class 3L.
By the time I've found him, and broken the news,
I've just aboot wore oot a pair o' shoes.
Five more minutes o' the period remain:

I feel as if I'm goin' insane.
I take the damned phone aff the hook
And tell the class tae open their book.
A knock at the door. 'Can I have a tape-recorder?'
Then the secretary comes up tae tell me ma phone's out of order
And 'The Rector would like to see you at ten to two'
And I think Oh God, what have I done noo?
And then the bell rings. The class goes out.
And I have taught them precisely nowt.
Next class comes in. There goes the phone.
It's the school doctor, wi' his cheerful tone.
'Send the boys down to the medical room, please.'
The class thinks this is a tremendous wheeze.
I'm left wi' half a class. 'Now, read a book,' I say.
Maybe I'll get some markin' out the way.
The phone rings. Just when I thought my nerves had mended.
'There's a class in the library unattended.
And someone's just been sick on a chair,
And Mr Gilroy's just got there.'
That's when the migraine starts — the mental pain
That feels like a needle in your brain.
I nibble at a piece o' chalk
And pray Please God, let it soon be eleven o'clock!
At last the bell goes. Doon I go,
Tae the staffroom's warm and cheery glow.
But before I get there, I'll just check
My pigeon-hole. I do. Oh heck.

It's packed wi' every form you care tae mention:
Each one demanding immediate attention.
There's reports, and bills, and sure as fate
They've all tae be filled up in triplicate.
Forms tae hand oot tae ma register classes;
Circular letters and late bus passes,
Reminders that I've done things I'll probably die for
And a note frae Mr Hodge I canna decipher.

So, feelin' demoralised and awfy
I stagger in for ma Twix and coffee.
I slump down. Fall asleep. 'Wakey wakey!'
Aye, you've guessed it: Mr Blakey.
'Just check these arrangements for the exam...'
Ye canna tell the man tae scram.
I try tae get ma mind tae wark,
But I'm somehow lacking that vital spark.

Sit down. Sip coffee ... peace at last.
A knock at the staffroom door. Oh blast!
'Is Mr Lindsay there?' You hear the request.
Standup. Spill coffee. What a pest!
Some pupils the staffroom seem tae haunt.
'Yes?' 'Oh, it's the other Mr Lindsay I want.'
The bell rings. End of interval. Oh hooray.
It's time tae get on wi' ma day.
'Up tae ma room wi' a weary moan —
Just in time tae answer the phone.
But soon the class is settled doon
And a' the books are handed roon.
Silence. 'Turn to page ten of Animal Farm'---
Whoops ... there goes the fire alarm!
Out we go, in the drivin' rain
While Mr Hodge counts up every wean;
Then back again, quite wet, and wearied,
Just in time for the end o' the period.
One more class, then the lunch-bell will ring,
And I still havena managed tae teach a thing.

Ah well, I'll give mysel' a wee treat
I'll have a read o' the absentee sheet.
I like surprises. Here's a beauty -
I found I'm down for dinner duty.
Oh here, that's really made ma day:
At this rate I'll soon be turnin' grey.

Let's start the lesson. Let's get goin' :
Nae more o' this silly to-ing and fro-ing!
'Open your books at page seventy-two!'
The phone goes. 'Mr Lindsay, it's a call for you!'
Then a pupil's sent to me for being cheeky in class,
And 'Please can I go and collect ma bus pass?'
And 'Please Sir, can you shut the blind?'
It's enough tae drive you oot your mind.
And the one that really gets me cursin':
'Can I go to the toilet, Sir, I'm burstin'.'
Or 'Please Sir, I havena got a pen.'
Don't hit the child. Just count to ten.
Will I EVER get started. Just as I begin,
Jimmy Leighton the technician breezes in
And he tells me --- I feel my heart turn over and sink
That the video machine is on the blink.
That's this afternoon's lesson up the spout.
That's when I start tae yell and shout
And scream and roar, and weep, and bawl,
And bang ma held against the wall.
The class look on wi' cheerful gaze
Thinkin' 'Mr Lindsay's havin' one o' his days.'
The phone rings. It's Nancy — may heaven protect her —
'Send Joe Bloggs down to the Rector'.
A knock at the door. It's a boy lookin' for glue:
I'm tempted to tell him what he can do.

The bell goes. Lunch-time. For a second I'm perplexed.
Oh aye, it's dinner duty I've got next.
Of all school duties, none is horridier
Than supervising that dinner queue in the corridor.
Unless it's actually watchin' them eat
Now there's a sicht tae mak ye greet.
You should see them gobble — Holy Moses
stikin' bridies up ther noses:
Pliikin' baked bean in each others faces .
Stikin' their fork in unlikely places.
There's one wi' his mouth open like an ill-trained pup
You can see his chip sandwich a' half chewed up:
There's someone coughin' over-someone else's plate:
The risk of infection is very great.
There's one sittin there in a doze:
Sookin his orange juice and pickin' his nose.

Up tae the staffroom for a grouch
And in a chair tae slump and slouch.
Here comes Mr Hodge — too late tae hide —
He comes and sits down by my side.
'Er .. what about exam marks in SII?'
I knew I should have gone and hidden in the loo.
I hadna realised that ma lunch time rest meant
A discussion of criterion-referenced assessment.
And if there's one thing that makes me want to start running
It's any mention whatsoever of Munn and Dunning.

The bell goes. Non-teaching period — no, it's not.
There's that 'please take — I almost forgot.
Let's see. Oh no, for goodness sake.
It's a French class I've got to take.
Up the stair and there they are:
I recognise that class for afar.
In the corridors you sometimes find 'em
Wi' their knuckles dragging along the floor behind 'em.

BONJOUR MES ENFANTS I say, wi' a smile broad and greasy,
VOTRE usual teacher N'EST PAS ICI.
JE VAIS VOUS DONNER VOTRE LECON, SI JE PEUX.
In fact, all I can do is try MON MIEUX.
OUVREZ VOS LIVRES. OH TRES BON.
ECOUTES. OUI. C'EST LE TELEPHONE.
Yes, what the hell is it now, I cry
'It's the Rector here,' comes the reply.
'You forgot our appointment. It just won't do.
I'll see you tomorrow at precisely two.'
The line goes dead. It's the last straw.
I swallow doon some aspirins raw.
I've taken so many I no longer bother to tally 'em:
And at this rate I'll soon me movin' the Valium.
The class meantime has been getting merrier:
So I threaten to kick the next one who moves, on the DERRIERE
To the mysteries of French I am an alien:
I thought MOI AUSSI meant 'I'm an Australian'.
Er ... CONTINUEZ AVEC VOTRE TRAVAIL I shout in rage:
Back comes the reply 'Please Sir, what page?'
TOURNEZ A LA PAGE OU VOUS stopped last -time:
My brain hurts. This is not a relaxin' pastime.

At least it's no a Maths class — that prospect bleak:
When I'd really be up the creek.
I canna tell Pythagoras from Plato
An' I thought a cubed root was a diced potato.
The bell rings. Back I go tae my room:
Never mind, four o'clock must come soon.
The phone goes for the hundredth time:
It's Mr Hodge who is on the line.
'Well, have you dealt 'with it yet?' I quake in fear.
'Well, have you? I've got the parents here.'
'Er, what do you mean?..' My knees start tae knock,
'I put it in your pigeon hole at nine o'clock!!!'
Now I mind — that cryptic wee scribble:
But whaur did I pit it? That's the trouble.
I yell at the class, 'Just write an essay.'
A girl put her hand up — that wee pest, Jessie —
'How long does it have to be sir?' she enquires
'Er ... ten foolscap pages. Good practice for your Highers.'
I rush oot, find the note, and pray
For the bell that'll signal the end of the day.
Why couldn't a miracle happen — a heavenly gift —
Like maybe gettin' stuck a' day in the lift.

At last an end comes to the day:
Homeward I wend my weary way.
I'm met on the doorstep by ma wife:
After this day o' trouble and strife.
She say 'There's a phone call. It's for you:'
Then she Wonders why I turn blue.
This kind o' pressure's hard tae- get used tae
And think: tomorrow's only Tuesday.
So if to teaching you do aspire,
Just think: it's filled wi' perils dire.
For a quieter way o' earnin' your daily bread ---
TRY JOININ' THE SAS INSTEAD!