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I reading

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opening extract from

Excuses, Excuses

written by

John Foster

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Back-to-School Blues

Hair's been cut. It's neat again.
Got socks and shoes on my feet again.
Saddled with a bag as new as my shoes,
I got the mean ol' back-to-school blues.

Elizabeth Honey

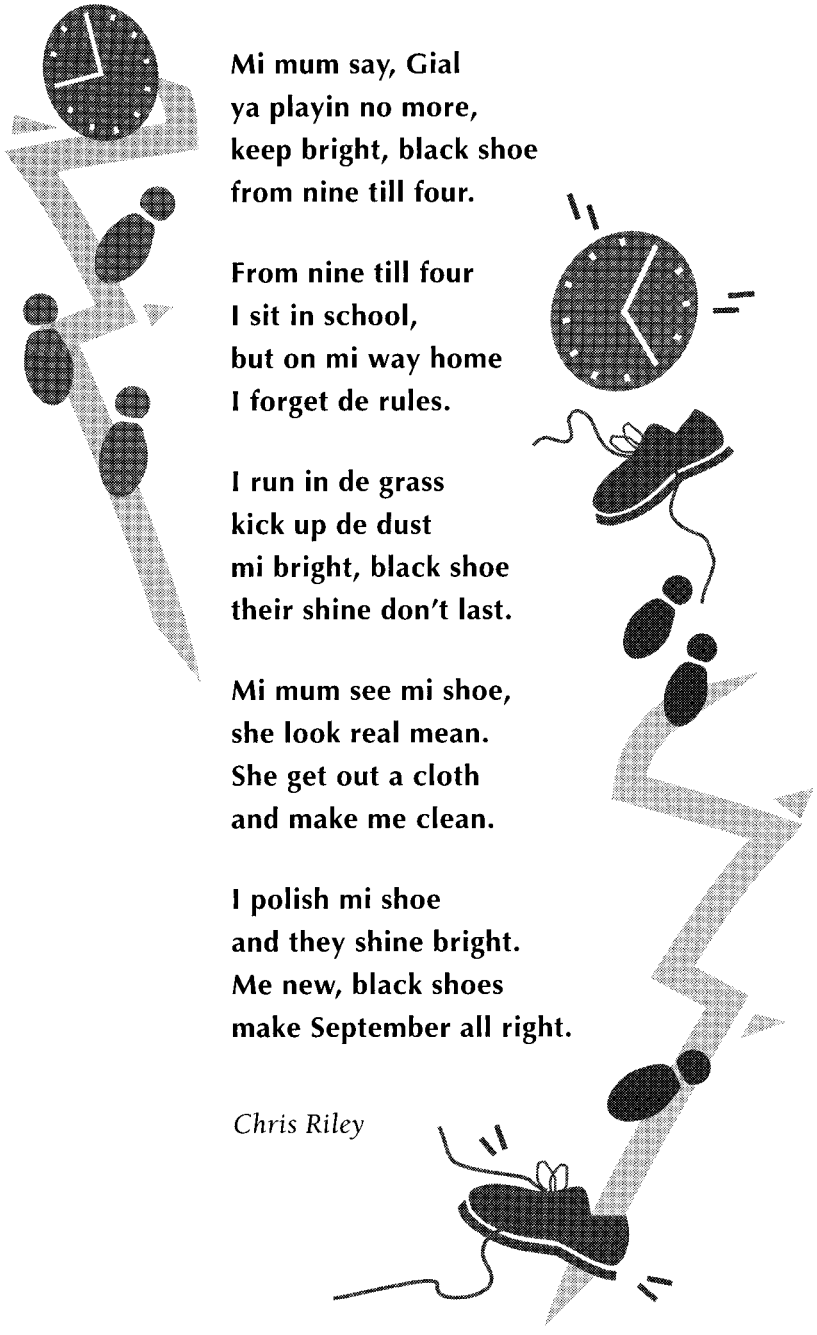


September Shoe Rap

De only good ting
bout back to school
is buyin new shoes
and playin de fool.

September here,
summer garn,
mi trainers off,
mi new shoes on!





Mi mum say, Gial
ya playin no more,
keep bright, black shoe
from nine till four.

From nine till four
I sit in school,
but on mi way home
I forget de rules.

I run in de grass
kick up de dust
mi bright, black shoe
their shine don't last.

Mi mum see mi shoe,
she look real mean.
She get out a cloth
and make me clean.

I polish mi shoe
and they shine bright.
Me new, black shoes
make September all right.

Chris Riley

Uniform

'You'll grow,' she said and that was that. No use
To argue and to sulk invited slaps.
The empty shoulders drooped, the sleeves hung
loose —
No use — she nods and the assistant wraps.

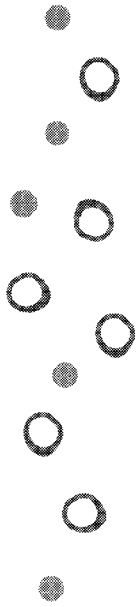
New blazer, new school socks and all between
Designed for pea pod anonymity.
All underwear the regulation green;
Alike there's none to envy, none to pity.

At home she feasts on pins. She tacks and tucks
Takes in the generous seams and smiles at thrift.
I fidget as she fits. She tuts and clucks.
With each neat stitch she digs a deeper rift.

They'll mock me with her turnings and her hem
And laugh and know that I'm not one of them.

Jan Dean





Quieter Than Snow

I went to school a day too soon
And couldn't understand
Why silence hung in the yard like sheets
Nothing to flap or spin, no creaks
Or shocks of voices, only air.

And the car park empty of teachers' cars
Only the first September leaves
Dropping like paper. No racks of bikes
No kicking legs, no fights,
No voices, laughter, anything.

Yet the door was open. My feet
Sucked down the corridor. My reflection
Walked with me past the hall.
My classroom smelt of nothing. And the silence
Rolled like thunder in my ears.

At every desk a still child stared at me
Teachers walked through walls and back again
Cupboard doors swung open, and out crept
More silent children, and still more.

They tiptoed round me
Touched me with ice-cold hands
And opened up their mouths with laughter
That was

Quieter than snow.

Berlie Doherty

First Day

I still can remember
My first day at school
In that dim and distant
Dusty, chalky past.

And often I wish,
With each new September,
That my first tearful day
Had been also my last!

John Kitching

I'm Telling You

Mam said
'If you wear that skirt when you go to school
You'll look a fool
I'm telling you.'
'Go on,' I said. 'Mam,' I said. 'Let me.'

Mam said
'If you wear that skirt you'll look a fright
It's much too tight
I'm telling you.'
'Go on,' I said. 'Mam,' I said. 'Let me.'

Mam said
'If you wear that skirt it'll split in two
They'll laugh at you
I'm telling you.'
'Go on,' I said. 'Mam,' I said. 'Let me.'

'Everybody's got one, Mam,' I said,
'I can't wear my old one
I wouldn't be seen dead
In that now,' I said.
'Go on,' I said. 'Mam,' I said. 'Let me.'

So I'm wearing it and
I've got to stand
And watch the others tearing round
I can't move an inch
I feel all pinched
The sides will split if I try to sit down.

I felt really great
When I came through the gate
'I like your skirt, it's really nice,
Are you playing or not?'

They didn't ask twice
They ran, and skipped, and swung,
  and jumped,
And left me standing.
On my own.

Dumped.

Berlie Doherty

Latecomers

There's a special club
In our school;
The latecomers club.

They catch slow buses
From distant places,
Never have alarm-clocks,
Always have excuses,
Wonderful excuses!

In assembly,
They sit in a bunch,
Just inside the door,
Pretending not to exist.

They grow up to be;
Glib of tongue,
Never, seemingly, in the wrong;
Novelists;
Television script-writers;
Antique dealers;
Politicians.

Such are the benefits,
Of creative excuse-making.

John Cunliffe



Absent

Dear Teacher,
my body's arrived
it sits at a table
a pen in its hand
as if it is able
to think and to act
perhaps write down the answer
to the question you've asked

but don't let that fool you.

My mind is elsewhere.
My thoughts far away.

So apologies, teacher,
I'm not here today.

Bernard Young



Excuses, Excuses

Late again, Blenkinsopp?
What's the excuse this time?
Not my fault, sir.
Whose fault is it then?
Grandma's, sir.
Grandma's? What did she do?
She died, sir.
Died?
She's seriously dead all right, sir.
That makes four grandmothers this term, Blenkinsopp
And all on P.E. days.
I know. It's very upsetting, sir.
How many grandmothers have you got, Blenkinsopp?
Grandmothers, sir? None, sir.
You said you had four.
All dead, sir.
And what about yesterday, Blenkinsopp?
What about yesterday, sir?
You were absent yesterday.
That was the dentist, sir.
The dentist died?
No, sir. My teeth, sir.
You missed the maths test, Blenkinsopp!
I'd been looking forward to it, sir.
Right, line up for P.E.
Can't, sir.
No such word as 'can't', Blenkinsopp.
No kit, sir.

Where is it?
Home, sir.
What's it doing at home?
Not ironed, sir.
Couldn't you iron it?
Can't, sir.
Why not?
Bad hand, sir.
Who usually does it?
Grandma, sir.
Why couldn't she do it?
Dead, sir.



Gareth Owen

Please Let Me Stay At Home

Must I go to school?
Must I go today?
I'd rather stay at home,
or go outside and play.

Must I see the teachers?
Can't I stay in bed?
School just isn't any fun
since they made me Head.

Andrew Collett