

THE GIRL WHO FORGETS HOW TO WALK

Kate Davis is a poet and storyteller. She was born in 1951 on the Furness peninsula of south Cumbria and has always lived there. Her poems have been published in *Iota* and *Butcher's Dog*, implanted in audio-benches, sung throughout a 12-hour tide cycle, embroidered on clothes, remixed by a sound artist and printed on shopping bags. In 2013 she received a Northern Writers' Award, New Poets Bursary.

The Girl Who Forgets
How to Walk

Kate Davis

Penned in the Margins

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The Girl
Who Forgets
How to
Walk

Peninsula

We never speak of it, but here we know the land
cannot be trusted. So a woman
might reach out her hand
towards a rail in Debenhams
and for a fraction of a second
knows the earth beneath the town
is shifting as limestone lays itself open to rain,
grains of sandstone slacken
then let go, cracks in old mineshafts expand
and another gram of soil slips sideways
without a sound.

She picks out a dress in pink,
holds it up to her friend; they laugh, link arms
on their way to Costa, and sip mocha
as the Permo-Triassic rocks dip
further west, the glacial sediments of Walney drift
towards the spits
and the peninsula hunches down
in the astounding wind.

Explanation of quarter sheet 91 N.W.

Illustrating the geology of the southern part of the Furness district in North Lancashire — William Talbot Aveline F.G.S. 1873

the land here is undulating rounded smooth
small brooks run through low flat tracts of land
near the sea there are salt-water marshes
the place is made up of superficial deposits —

Blown Sand

Alluvium

Sand and Gravel

Boulder Drift

and stratified rocks —

Red Sandstone

Magnesian Limestone

Yoredale Shales and Limestone

Carboniferous Limestone

there is one Trap Dyke

Relativity

When they were knocking down
Anson Street I watched a woman
in clear space ten feet above the rubble
lift her hem to button a shoe.
A man asleep in mid-air turned over
to ease his bloody cough. Further away
a boy stood gazing down,
his palms and lips pressed against
nothing at all. There are nights when,
eyes open in the dark,
I too am in that blue space
ten feet above the ground
as the constant wind
blows round the curve of the earth.

Crossing to the Island

i. A view of the channel from the bridge

The only bridge is this old one with iron parapets.
If we stop here, where it lifts to let sail pass,

where solid metal is a sudden fence,
then wild air will remind us that the earth is fretful,

won't let water settle, that it will deploy its mass,
its rhythms and heart to make the sea rise up

like an awful infant, do that sword-swallower's trick,
lick the grey dolphins then slip

each stanchion down its gullet. No. We can't allow
ourselves to listen to that lit flow

murmuring — *breathe in... slide through... let go...*

ii. A view of the bridge from the island

The channel's almost empty — empty enough
for anyone who didn't know better to think
how easy it would be to leave this promenade,

walk the mussel-beds and ghost-stones
of the old footpath, cross over to the town
long before the tide turns. Some days,

if we look too long at small boats dumped
by the ebb and stuck, we think it ourselves;
but even from this distance we can read

the bridge's warning, where thin girders
write cuneiform in the air, decipher the scrawl,
up there since last March when a mad sea

blasted another terrible tale in scum
along the length of the parapet. We know
too well the kind of stories the sea tells.

Limestone (CaCO₃)

Limestone is a sedimentary rock composed primarily of calcium carbonate (CaCO₃).

It is formed in clear, warm, shallow marine waters from the accumulated skeletal remains of marine organisms. These remains are often fragmental and have frequently been recrystallized during burial. The more complete fossil remains chart evolutionary change through the immensity of geological time. Some of the most ancient limestones, formed 3.7-3.5 billion years ago, contain stromatolites, formed by the binding of sediment by cyanobacteria. Palaeozoic limestones contain fossil trilobites, brachiopods, crinoids and ancient tabulate and rugose corals, whilst more familiar-looking bivalves, echinoids and the more modern scleractinian corals are found in Mesozoic and Cenozoic limestones. The limestones of northern England were deposited in tropical latitudes around 340-325 million years ago.

Limestone is alkaline — it will dissolve in acid.

Adapted from 'Limestone' by Dr Tim Tranter

Bodies

I keep parts of certain creatures
in jars of formaldehyde and freezers.
I do this because they are wonderful —

so strong are the anchors
that hold an eye to its bone ring,
I dedicate a new blade to each

to free intact those whole
and wholly perfect globes.
Such tenacity is wonderful.

The gullets of sea-birds
are wonderful. They are ridged
and flexing Graphene atom tubes.

The skull of a hare is wonderful.
It is thinned to transparency, a mesh
of bone-threads held together by air.

A gannet's skull is the same pure,
white marble I've seen exposed
in the dazzling quarries of Thassos.

I lay out the parts in patterns, take pictures,
put them safely away. How could I not
treasure such wonderful things?