

St. Nicholas, Galway

It is an old story, written in brass  
That shimmers on slanted beams in the sun,  
Torments crudely borne by grieving classmates,  
The fellow Glaswegians of John Thompson,  
Francis Langley Kinkead, Thomas Roberts,  
“Who were drowned together, at age nineteen,  
Off Cladagh Point, in Lough Carrib,” that summer  
of 1887. They had been

Swimming, or boating, we are not given  
The details, just a solemn remembrance  
From the pupils and Masters at their school.  
We suspect an error of indifference.

Across the aisle, another brass plaque  
Recalls the death of James Johnston Kearney  
“Who departed this life at age eleven.  
Having just dropped his top,” he did not see

The carriage rolling by, one gray morning  
in 1837. The boy stooped  
To regain it, and so was promptly crushed  
By screeching wooden wheels and horses’ hooves.

We can imagine the eager faces  
Of these young dead, if light shined in their eyes  
Of green or brown or blue, when jokes were made  
Or if startled by some genial surprise.

We might wonder who should have cautioned them  
About hidden currents and sudden storms  
That devise their malevolent furies  
With no signal, no sounding of alarm.

And who, we ask, released the tiny hand,  
Just a slight turning, a moment so brief,  
Enthralled, perhaps, by a feather drifting  
Through the air, or a swirling willow leaf.