THE
BOOK
OF
DAMP

IMAGES BY IAN BEESLEY
POEMS BY IAN MCMILLAN
THE BOOK OF DAMP

You can’t open it, easily. The pages
Are stuck together, half-sodden.
They’re held in place by mould.
This is a terrible story of cold.

I mean, this is a story of terrible
Cold, a tale of vindictive weather;
This volume’s not softback by choice.
The damp has seeped into my voice.

Listen: I’m only whispering. Look
At how my fingers shiver, turn blue.
My language is groaning with cramp.
Words drip from the long Book of Damp.
As you try to scrape him away
From a window made of ice, glass, ice.

Some call him Jack.
Some just call him names.

Some call him Jack.
Some can’t call him anything
Their mouths are too frozen to speak.

Some call him Jack.
Some just call him the noise you make
As you try to scrape him away
From a window made of ice, glass, ice.

Some call him Jack.
Some call him beautiful,
Kiss the window with their tea-breath
To make him go away.
But he always comes back. Jack.
A big hole at the side of the window, you can see the daylight through it.

Put more clothes on
Get dressed with your dressing gown
On.

POEMS FOUND DOWN
THE BACK OF A BROKEN RADIATOR
The kids are scared to death
When it’s dark. The panic goes from here (gestures)

Bedroom carpet and wardrobe
And everything. Mouldy.
Wet through and black. Mouldy.
As soon
As I walk
In I’m
Freezing.

I’ve sat there
Wind rain and shine.
No gas. No electric
COLD SNAPS

This life is like eating chips with gloves on. Oven gloves. Oven gloves Straight from the fridge.

We were talking last night And the words froze. Had to hold them over the cooker To thaw them out, Over the reddening ring To hear just what we said.

When your breath hangs in the kitchen air It’s as though the whole house is steaming But then you see your hands shaking And you know you were just dreaming.

Cold makes you old Before your time; Cold’s clutching grime Dirties your heart Before you can start To live. Sharp cold, Sharp as a long knife Freezes your life.

A four letter word: cold. A four letter word: warm. I was told not to use four letter words. But I am (four letter word), I want to be (four letter word).
DON'T TAKE MY PICTURE!

Don’t take my picture!
Don’t take me!
I’m hiding over here
Behind the big settee
I’ll cover up my face
Cover up my head
I’ll hide in the kitchen
Hide in the shed
(except we haven’t got a shed)
But don’t take my picture
Don’t take me!
The Book of Damp has developed from the Warm Well Families (WWF) research project. WWF families examined the factors influencing the ability of households with children with asthma to keep warm and well in winter. WWF was conducted by Sheffield Hallam University in partnership with Doncaster and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Councils and Consumer Futures.

More detail about the WWF methods and findings can be found here: www.shu.ac.uk/research/hsc/ourexpertise/warm-well-families
Fuel Poverty is:

- Sometimes the reason children are ill
- Sometimes the reason adults are physically and/or mentally unwell
- Sometimes the reason people are in debt
- Sometimes why people are socially isolated
- Sometimes why houses seem unkempt and not looked after.

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(GROW is a voluntary sector organisation working with Rotherham women and their families and supporting them to make informed choices.)

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