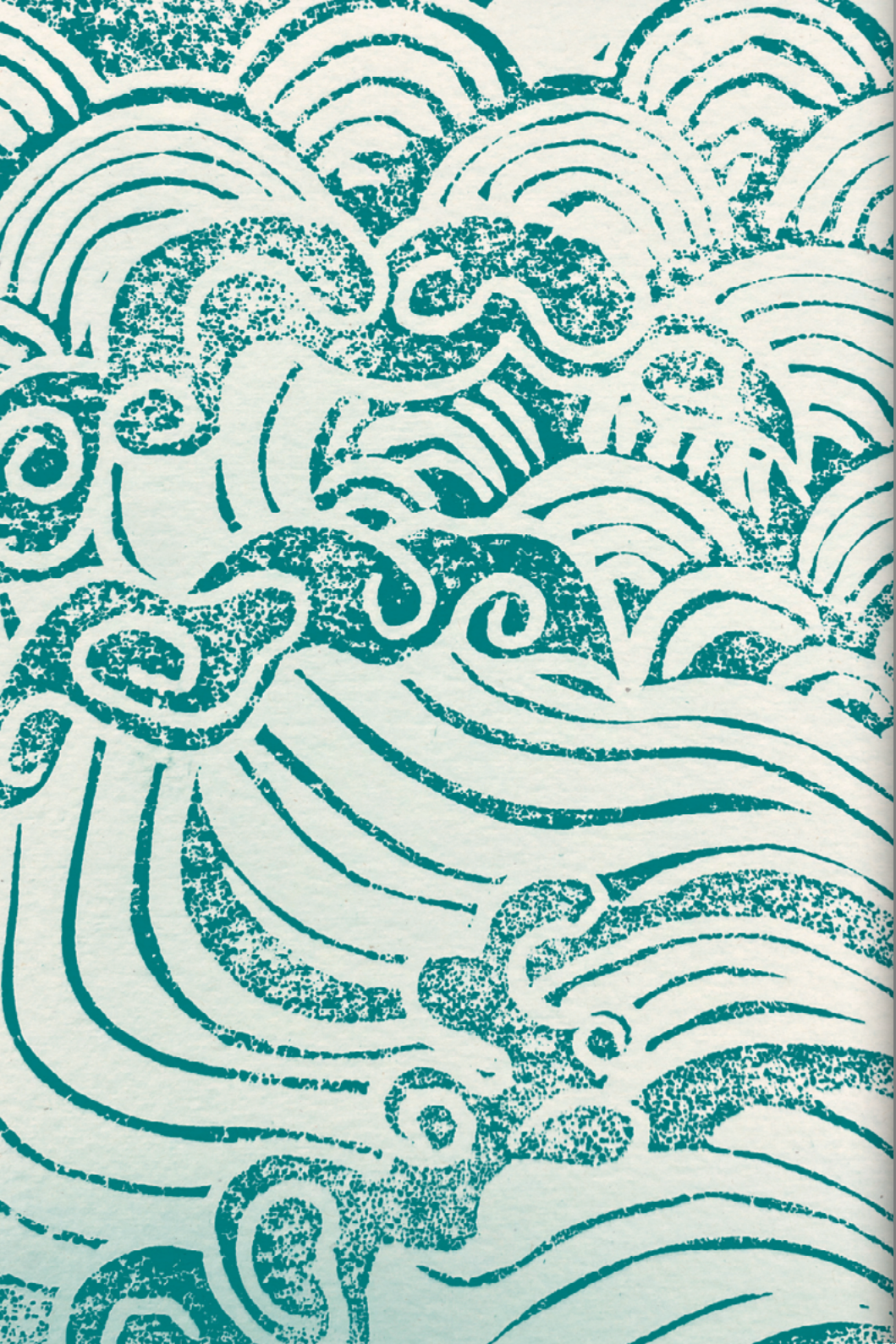


The background of the cover is a stylized, high-contrast illustration in shades of blue and white. It depicts a large, craggy sea stack on the left, with waves crashing against its base and swirling around it. The overall style is graphic and expressive, with thick black outlines and a textured, almost painterly quality.

Sea Change

Anthology of Leith Writing



Sea Change

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Foreword

The first volume of these Leith Writings was called 'The Darting Salamander' and in his foreword Andrew Cubie described that title as compelling because the contents of the book were set in the history of Leith but looked to the future. In this, the fourth volume of Leith Writings, the same considerations apply. The expression 'sea change' can be defined as a profound or notable transformation and that is exactly what has taken place in Leith over the last seventy or eighty years.

In the early 1970's Leith was a depressed and depressing area weighed down by high unemployment and slum housing with little in the way of new development. In 1972 the Reverend Elizabeth Wardlaw, a local councillor and a great champion of Leith and its people, composed a poem which she called 'A Dream for Leith'. In this poem she wrote:

"I have a dream for Leith –

a dream where there are pleasant homes and happy people.

... I have a dream that from this dispirited; disillusioned; depressed area

there will arise a community

... enfolding within it the stranger from other lands, the refugee, the visitor in port, the vigorous young and the honoured old."

There has been a 'Sea Change' since then and, whilst nowhere is perfect, much of that dream has come true with Leith having become much more exciting, vibrant and diverse place to live and work.

The production of the Leith Writings series of books is a tangible example of this change and in writing the foreword for the fourth volume we came to reflect on just how substantial that change has been. Year by year it has crept forward hardly noticeable from one year to the next, but the cumulative effect has been great. Long may these improvements continue! In considering this volume we came to see it as a form of recognition and celebration of these changes. We are sure that you will enjoy the contents, and we hope that you too will reflect on the 'Sea Change' that has taken place in Leith and take pleasure in that too.

Dick and Margaret Allan

Introduction

The theme of this collection of writings is change and more specifically change in Leith; and having been brought up in the Leith of the 1940s and 50s, I am aware of many changes there since the days of my childhood. Physically, there's been redevelopment of the foreshore area; traditional industries have declined, and old work opportunities have been replaced by newer ones. There's also been great changes in the population as a consequence of both outward and inward movement of folk. In the personal lives of Leithers there are now no more skipping ropes and peevers and fitba in the streets, no more horse-drawn vans lined up in Bangor Road on a Saturday morning, no more outside toilets in the tenements. Am I beginning to sound a bit like The Proclaimers?

Most surprising for me however has been the transformation in the public's perception of EH6 - Leith Swings, Leith is Cool, the place to be - as youngsters we'd have smiled sardonically at such suggestions. No swish restaurants during the years of post-war austerity and no cafe society - Lannie's in Henderson Street was the closest we got to that, but the picture houses, chip shops and pubs did brisk trade and for most of us, other than going up town or (literally) to the dogs at Powderhall, these were the destinations of choice when we were "going out" - the Eldorado's hey-day was a bit before my time! All gone now, but one thing does endure, the universally held conviction that Leith is definitely not Edinburgh and that Leithers are to be defined and characterised by what they're not: as is the case today, we had no pretensions about who we were. And in the writers who've

contributed to this collection that legacy is evident, each aware that they are stamped with the individualism of Leithers - no change there.

Regarding the contributions to this volume, some give a sense of the past, some a sense of the present, some compare past and present. Taken together they make up a variety of works in content and style - prose and poetry items from pupils of Trinity Academy, a factual account of a significant change seen in his lifetime from a long established Leither Lawrence Dinse in his account of the last day of work in the last of the shipyards, and a range of literary genres from aspiring local writers. While giving a wonderfully portmanteau effect to the collection the assembling of work from such disparate sources must have presented the editors with a formidable challenge - how comfortably would the unaffected and innocent submissions of youngsters sit with the life experience works of adults using mature writing styles? It's a challenge that the compilers of this volume have tackled by attempting to ensure that all of the items selected can, to a greater or lesser extent, be seen as relating to the theme of change.

The first item in the collection, striking the unifying theme, is *All Change*, Annie McCrae's play on the word "change". The last item by Mike Cowley, is *Nothing Has Ever Changed*, which argues that only when "the men of moderation" and all they stand for, are swept away and "A Year Zero proclaimed", will there be the possibility of change in the form of a new order. Between these book-end pieces other writers give due attention to the theme of change in theirs. So, in a similar vein to Mike Cowley's, Dan Brady's *When It's Over* makes the point that only when man and all his works have disappeared will Nature celebrate and thrive.

More relaxedly, Eva King in *The Shore* dwells on the inevitability of change, and notes that “she watched as the stream changed, much like her life”. Eilidh Robertson in her poem *Sea Changes*, like Eva, draws inspiration from the movements of water and compares the changes wrought by the passing of time to the ebb and flow of tide, concluding that “The sadness is evened out by the happiness”, and Lucy Spoor heads up the final stanza of her *Roadworks* with the line “Change can be good or bad”. The most obvious accounts of change are those of Francesca Campopiano with *A New Family* and Tudor Serban with *A Full Life*, who write about their coming to live in Leith.

The anthology also includes among its poetical works *Leithers’ Lament*, a song by Joss Cameron in memory of her grandad who went to sea and never returned, and *The Day My Colour Changed*, by Ninarosa Gunson-Milne. Ninarosa’s poem is about a tree looking at the effect of autumn on her foliage, concluding that “they lied when they said - autumn is beautiful.”

A notable exception to speculation on the passing of time is Gabrielle Tse, who in her three well-crafted poems focuses on the unique present, living in the moment, creating a sense of what’s important in that moment and subordinating all else to that ephemeral experience. Am I right in thinking that that’s the essence of mindfulness? In a different tone of voice yet having some affinity with the concept of awareness of the moment is Garry Stanton’s *The Water of Leith of Consciousness*.

Among the several prose works in this volume is *Leaving Harbour* by Benjamin Darlas, which is about the privations endured by sailors in past centuries. There’s also Rachel Burns’ *Sunday Trips*, in which a young woman reflects nostalgically on how she was

indulged by her grandad some 30 years before, leading to her realisation that in some ways she might not have changed in character from the young girl of these days. *Once Upon a Time in North Edinburgh* by Bernard Harkins is a fantastical story of how a mysterious creature emerges from the Forth to wreak mayhem on Wardie immediately and probably on the world thereafter. And close on its heels regarding wildly imaginative pieces are the apocalyptic *COVID Crawlers* by Noah Stewart-Brown and the charming *Wings* by Freya Jardine, which tells of a transformational day in the life of a young girl.

Most movingly written among the short stories are *Long Walk* by Alistair Rutherford, describing how Cathy responds when Ben announces he’s about to set off on the long walk of the title, and *Winged Horse* by Ruth Campbell, a sensitively written piece in which a rag and bone man takes a rifle to put down an ageing horse. Another story to touch the heart is Rachel Barr’s *Recovery*, which is about an addict struggling to come to terms with her addiction and the death of her mother. *Princess in the Tower* by Gavin Smith, the longest of the stories, is a teasingly complicated work in which a retired teacher encounters a younger version of herself, and their meeting is used as a vehicle to look back on the might-have-beens in her life.

So, what’s an old Leither with an interest in writing to make of this volume as a whole? It’s certainly very different from the kind of anthology that would have been produced in my youth. It’s lively, idiosyncratic in its disparate elements, innovative in some pieces, traditional in others, but always thought provoking: it bodes well for what will be produced in 2025 and future years.

John Young

All Change

Short change, loose change, spare change,
change for the bus, change for the meter,
got no change.

Change the clocks, change hands,
change with the times, change with the seasons,
the change of life.

Change face, change clothes, change colour
change into, change out of,
change your ways.

Ring the changes, change your tune,
change the sheets, change partners,
change for the worse, change of heart.

Change gear, change down,
change direction, change trains,
change places, change around,
change of address, change sides.

Sea change, step change,
regime change, climate change.
All change.

Annie McCrae

Recovery

“I’m glad to see you back, ma’ man. What was it again, latte? No, no, I’ll get this. No worries at all. Sick of coffee yet? Hahaha. Aye, exactly! Take what we can get.

“I usually go for that spot, mate, by the window. There’s space to chat.

“Aye, they keep the gardens nice here, mate. It’s a nice view, even on cloudy days. In summer they open all this up, you can sit outside. Past that back wall there is the water, and then the firth, just further back. A lot of birds pass over here to get there. You can hear them.

“The coffees are no’ bad here. The cakes are good too, bro! If you’ve a sweet tooth. I’m here twice most days, so I need to watch, bud! Piling on the pounds, aha. Even with the walking. The swimming.

“I’m glad to see you back, mate. I dinnae want to sound patronising, but it’s a big step. Progress. This is the third time, aye? That’s brilliant, mate. Routine matters. At some stages, that’s all it is. Keeping it up, one day at a time.

“As I say, I’m here twice a day most days. The afternoon’s important, cos that’s when you’re tempted. If there’s nothing else on, nothing planned for the night. Mornings are the easy part, ma’ man, it’s the afternoons, the evenings... that’s the trick a’ it.

“That’s why the church is good too, mate. Having a place to go, to sit. Being wae other people. Space to think - even if you dinnae

believe. The ritual of it works. All that repetition, it’s like school again. Kids are happier wae a structure, they say that. That’s always been my problem, I had fuck all a’ that, aha. Ritual, it takes the choice out your hands.

“I keep thinking about that. They years, being at school. About this English teacher I had. This young guy, Mr Grant. I always liked English, and Mr Grant seemed to like me. One a’ the few. I’d be taking the piss in class, telling these daft wee stories, for attention like, but he’d actually listen to what I was saying. He’d end up encouraging me. That’s a good one, Michael. Write that down.

“He gave me a couple of books, and there’s one I keep thinking about, Huckleberry Finn, this American book, an old book. And I cannae remember reading it, but I remember the cover. The boy sitting barefoot against a tree, and the green of that tree, and the blue of the water beside him.

“Mr Grant didnae need to give me that book, and I think it was his, no’ the schools. He didnae need to give me anything. He was kind to me at a point where hardly anyone else was.

“The other teachers, they acted repelled by some of us. Ones like me. I was a wee arsehole, no doubt about that, and it woulda been clear I was going completely off the rails. But we were kids. I was a kid. The older I get, the more I see how young I was. What kind of person writes off a 14 year old? Those other teachers, that’s what they did. No compassion, just a beady eye and these withering fucking take-downs. Mr Grant was the only one. And no’ just at school.

“I lost that book, anyway.

“Do you want another latte, mate? Aye, fair enough. Jittery eh? Haha. We can go for a walk around the garden if you like. Then down to the beach. It’s no’ far. I’ll grab one to take away.

“Oh, it’s still hot out, ae! Aye, it’s a nice spot, a wee sun trap! The garden is looked after by volunteers from the church. They come out and plant all this, maintain the grass and all that. The beds there are full a’ vegetables. They’ll start to pull them up in the next couple of months. People take them home and cook them.

“My sister sometimes helps. You’ve maybe seen her? Mhara? People are always saying we look alike. Aye, aha, Sylvanean families! Me and my sister and our big brother, they always said that.

“Mhara’s pretty involved wae it all now. The church. Volunteering wae the flowers and the gardens. Stopping in on the older people, getting their messages. That routine gives her a sense of purpose. Same as me.

“None a’ us were really religious growing up. Dinnae think our mum could cross the threshold of a church, aha. But Mhara was kind of drawn to it anyway. Because of who she is. She’s always had the sensibilities that the church is trying to get out a’ you. She’s a kind person. She’s a forgiving person.

“It’s funny, that used to be the thing that kept us apart. That kept me and Robert, our big brother, on the one side and Mhara on the other, always forgiving our mum when she didnae deserve it. We always seen it as her taking mum’s side. Mhara in the middle.

“Me and Robert, Rab, we’re the same. We’re actually a lot more like our mum than Mhara is. Stubborn. Quick to burn bridges.

“I needed somebody like Rab when I was wee. Someone to stand up to her, our mum, to stand beside me and say we wouldnae put up wae her shit.

“And now that same nature, that stubbornness, means I know Rab will never speak to me again. I know that, because I know him. I know what I would do, if it was the other way around.

“But Mhara, she was able to forgive me. That’s who she is. And that’s what I needed.

“It’s funny how three people brought up the same can end up so different ae?

“We ran away once, the three of us. Well, that’s the way I’ve always thought about it. Our dad came and got us. Kidnapped us, if you asked our mum.

“It was the winter. Our mum had this boyfriend, Lee, move in wae us. A really nasty piece a’ work. All my mum’s boyfriends were bad, but this guy was a real fucking corker.

“He’d just moved in wae us, and it was a nightmare, especially for Rab. He’d pick on Rab, go for him first. Because he was the biggest - though really he was still just a wee boy.

“It all came to a head just before Christmas. Lee chucked Rab out in the cold in his pyjamas. No shoes or anything. I snuck away and rang our dad, and he came to get us.

“He was a good guy, our dad. He’d just wasnae really in a situation where he was sorted. He was living in a house share in Glasgow, so there was no room for us. Still he came and got us early the next morning, while my mum and Lee were sleeping.

Piled the three of us intae the car and drove us up North to my Nana and Papa's.

"We were only there a few days, but I remember feeling so happy. We'd hardly ever spent any time wae that side of the family. I remember my dad's sister, my Auntie Elaine, bringing all our cousins over to see us. They brought us a few clothes and that, to get us by.

"We were about the same age as each other, and I remember wondering if I'd get to go to the same school as the cousins after the Christmas holidays. I really thought I'd get to live there. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like, like, if we had stayed. How things would a' ended up.

"We didnae stay though. I was the only one who really wanted to. Rab missed his pals, and Mhara missed our mum.

"She gave in and rang her, a couple days in. Told her where we were. After that the calls back just didnae stop. Our mum kept phoning and phoning, making all these promises. That she'd left Lee, that things would be different, that she missed us so much. That it was making her sick.

"And then the threats. Threats to our Dad. That she'd get him done, that she'd ring the Polis, that Lee would find him. That she'd go tae the courts and call it Kidnap. She'd get us back, and he wouldnae see us anymore, because men hardly ever win custody, and definitely no' the ones wae a criminal record.

"The fucked up thing was that she was right. The courts would have sided wae her. On paper, she was the better parent. What a joke, eh? So we came home.

"Sorry mate, I'll stop wae the origin story. I bet you know it! I've not even told you more than a coupla words a' it, and I bet you know it! Addiction stories are boring, cos we've all got the same one. Crap time as kids. Abuse - physical, verbal, you name it. Bad mums wae bad boyfriends. And then that switch, that point where it starts being something we dae to ourselves.

"You'll know this, or you'll learn it, but all that repetition - telling the same story about ourselves, over and over - it can end up being the thing that holds us back.

"Just saying the bad things, wallowing in them, believing them. That repetition, it's like the opposite of prayer.

"I don't know how you got intae all this, mate? If you were religious before? Or how you feel about it. If you believe?

"You dinnae even need to answer that mate. That's your business. Too big a question for a Tuesday morning! Aha. I'm not even sure what I believe, being totally honest, mate. Still thinking about it.

"But there's something in it. In prayer. That repetition. Telling yourself a story that's bigger than you. Saying the same words as other people have done, over and over. Saying them together. You can almost feel it - the grooves and edges where other people have been.

"That's important, I think, when all the other stories you've told yourself have been outside a' yourself too. And for me, that's what it was.

"It sounds mad - and it is, mate! I am mad! But that's always what it was. The only stories I ever told myself before I got clean were the ones my mum told me. Who I was. What we were. What we'd

done to her by existing.

“Our whole lives, our whole childhoods, revolved around her. Her life at the centre. Her story, her reality there, so I didnae form my own. The drugs, it was an escape. An annihilation. Of me, and of her. Her story.

“That’s never how it ends up though, ae? What I did ended in chaos, in annihilation, but not of me. Not of her. It’s always bigger than you are, that kind a’ destruction. It moves outwards, further than you can even picture. I didnae get that until it was too late.

“Sorry bud, I’m a bit lost. This cemetery’s a fucking maze! I think it’s left here?

“Some of these gravestones, along here... Aye, the ones wae the moss. I think it’s them. Until recently, all the ones ‘round this bit were completely covered up, a couple had keeled over. Ended up part a’ the undergrowth. These volunteers, they came out for a few weekends, and cleaned it all up.

“Aye, it’s a group. They fix old graves. Clean them, so you can see the name and the date. The style of the stone. They were out here one weekend in the spring and we got chatting, me and one of the women. She helped to clean them, she said, but then she’d log them too. Update the records, so people can find them for their family trees. So these people, the ones underneath, are no’ forgotten. Even hundreds of years later.

“My mum’s dead now. Buried somewhere like this - though hopefully a wee bit less nice. Out further intae the East, past Prestonpans. I’m no’ sure where exactly. I’ve never been and I never will.

“Ah thanks, mate. Appreciate that. It was a head fuck to be honest. Mostly I was relieved. It sounds mad mate, and I’m sorry for rambling on, but I never actually thought my mum would die. Not just that she’d outlive me, which at points was a fucking probability given what I was on - but genuinely, I didnae think she’d die.

“She was this huge force in our lives, and no’ for good. I dinnae want to call her evil either, cos I don’t believe that. I don’t think she could control it. But she was this force, like a natural disaster, like a wind, that took over everything and everyone around her. Everything, our whole lives, happened in reaction to her. The sheer force of her meant that was the way it had to be. And then she died, and all that went away.

“Me and Mhara - and I suppose Robert, though no’ directly wae me- we had to decide what to do wae her body. It was me who wanted her buried.

“I couldn’t go for the Cremation. She could have ended up anywhere. There, in the wind. Everywhere in a way. Just like she’d been in life. But I like the idea of her being buried. Off somewhere, small and rotten, in a wee patch I’ll never visit.

“I shouldnae think about it this way, but I do. I think a’ her death as a sort of penance for what happened. An eye for an eye. The damage I did, I know it was on me. I’ll spend the rest of my life reckoning with that. But my mum, it was her too. She got me there, to that point of annihilation. Always there, everywhere, this force, this destruction, moving outwards.

“It was a long time ago now. You never really know what to take from a loss. It’s always there, this gap. Things that were taken

from you. The things you've taken.

"I try to talk about her less now.

"Ah! And would you look at that, mate. It's good, ae? Amazing, really. That horizon, and all that blue!

"It always takes me by surprise, you know? Even now. You turn the corner and then there it is. There's the sea."

Rachel Barr

Roadworks

Crash! Bang! Boom!
The sounds of roadworks
I can hear it from my room
Almost as loud as fireworks

They're everywhere I go
Every turn I take
Why is it going so slow
How long does it take to make?

So loud and noisy
What an inconvenience
How it annoys me
We need to make an agreement

So much is changing in Leith
I can't keep track of it all
Will it be done by July 14th?
Who's going to make the final call?

Change can be good or bad
But we have to try to cope
Even if it makes us sad
We need to have hope

Lucy Spoor
Trinity Academy

Leithers' Lament

The callin o' the waters waves
Wind whistlin' like lost souls
Fir the sailors gang tae war before
When they left The Vinegar Close

STAR OF THE SEA, A GUIDING LIGHT
AND OLD LEITH IN MY SOUL
I'LL PERSEVERE AND FIGHT THE FIGHT
TILL SANDS O' TIME RUN SLOW

I kiss you on the cheek ma dear
I kiss yer brow sae fine
I'll never see my love again
Fir aw' the sands o' time

Wi heirt sae heavy and sae scared
I wis only 30 years
The sands o' time ran out the day
And how we shed our tears

STAR OF THE SEA, A GUIDING LIGHT
AND OLD LEITH IN MY SOUL
I'LL PERSEVERE AND FIGHT THE FIGHT
TILL SANDS O' TIME RUN SLOW

Oh I will luv ye true ma dear
My picture on the wall
And leave you nowt but memories
And three bairnies oh so sma'

STAR OF THE SEA, A GUIDING LIGHT
AND OLD LEITH IN MY SOUL
I'LL PERSEVERE AND FIGHT THE FIGHT
TILL SANDS O' TIME RUN SLOW

The telegram has now arrived
The sands o time stood still
And all that's left are memories
A medal, a flag and a gill.

STAR OF THE SEA, A GUIDING LIGHT
AND OLD LEITH IN MY SOUL
I'LL PERSEVERE AND FIGHT THE FIGHT
TILL SANDS O' TIME RUN SLOW

'Leither's Lament' is a song I wrote about my Grandad, sailing from Leith, going off to war on the Atlantic Convoys, and never coming home. He had a premonition that he would die at sea, and he did. Age 30.

Joss Cameron

Leaving Harbour

Sails up wide, blowing and fluttering in the wind these sheets of white.

Ever changing to the wind.

The hull filled with the scent of salt and decay holds steadfast against the tide.

The ship disembarked from the friendly shores of port Leith.

Ever knowing they are leaving with possibly without a chance of seeing...

the friendly ports and docks of Leith again.

The sailors as strong and hardy as the oak and log which makes the hull of their ship. Yet cheerful and bright this could all change.

Forever the captain bellowed to the crew, being their torch to wade across through the storm. Their vessel turning and slopping in accord with the waves, being a stallion galloping across the open sea. Ever wishing and pleading that these waters will show mercy to this poor vessel on the sea. The crew like the waters they fear will become their graves. Slipping, drizzling and draining down the hull of the brig.

The sailors yearned for safe passage across the sea. They yelped and begged as the waves got as violent as they've ever been and

they even screamed in fright as they spoke to soon as the waves grew large and greater than the ship could take. The waves like walls of blue crashing atop the ship and crackling like thunder upon the deck.

The ship however stood defiant as ever, prevailing against the skies and harsh winds; the ship's frame and hull creaked and stretched as the waves came crashing into the rear of the ship.

Finally, the men arrived, back on the friendly docks of the port of Leith.

Benjamin Dalmas
Trinity Academy

Sunday Trips

“No sweets. And she is not to go in the water.” It’s the usual spiel, shouted after us whenever grandad and I depart on our Sunday Trip. On cue, as we turn off Bonnington Road and onto Great Junction Street- Rule Number One is already in the process of being broken. Mars bars, Chomps and Freddos are passed to me with shady, practiced haste. A passing polis might mistake us for dealer and valued clientele. I consume a bar with the expertise of a seasoned pro. I needed that fix.

I skip ahead of Grandad, avoiding the debris of the previous Saturday night. Chippy wrappers, smashed bottles and pigeons are the hazards of my journey, but high on sugar I deftly avoid all obstacles and we make it to the Kirkgate unharmed.

Until of course, I am shot by local law enforcement outside the Tam O Shanter.

“BANG BANG.” An ancient looking cowboy, 2 guns and a silver sheriff’s badge shining, yells at me, his eyes full of the same childish mischief as mine. I best behave.

In ‘96 the timetables were as useless as a maroon clothes shop on Easter Road, and there were no electronic boards. But my grandad. My grandad could magic up a bus in no time.

“All you have to do is light up a smoke, and one’ll be here in less than 30 seconds.” In awe of this tried and tested trick, I watch the bus round the corner at the Fit o’ the Walk, our carriage coming to a halt in front of us. Without fail.

“Upstairs at the front,” I sing to the tune of ‘Ta rah rah boom de yay,’ because that is my chosen seat today. Or perhaps I should say, my chosen footstool. Grandad isn’t supposed to let me stand on the seat and hold onto the railing over the window, especially after that trip to the Sick Kids, but I promise him I’m being careful. And anyway, my eyebrow healed and everyone at school said I looked really cool, which is important for a six-year-old girl. So once again, mum’s rules are out the window, or more accurately, leaning against the window, looking out towards Newhaven.

Somehow, I manage not to disfigure myself from Leith to Granton Breakwater and I am already stripped to my pants and t shirt by the time I feel the slushy wet sand between my toes. A sharp intake of breath as I wade into the water. Baltic, but it doesn’t faze me.

Dogs become salmon to catch my sand bombs. I flip my hair around dramatically because just now, I am a mermaid. I lick the salt from my skin. Childish, rebellious joy. Grandad walks the beach looking for shells, cigarette in hand, chuckling at my antics. He points out Tracy Island in the distance, and I sit on the sand eagerly awaiting Thunderbird 1 to blast forth into the sky. It doesn’t launch, to my disappointment, but Grandad reassures me that Thunderbird 4 is under the water somewhere, so I am placated. We are both free from the confines of day-to-day. No one can tell us what to do today. Hours feel like minutes when you don’t have anything to worry about.

And then 30 long years go by, with Leith being rebuilt in shapes unfamiliar to those who lived in the past. The old characters fade

into memory, occasionally popping up in old Facebook posts about the history of the area.

Grandad drifted away two decades ago. Around the same time, the young girl started to vanish too, struggling to swim again a dark tide that seemed intent to wash her away. Maybe she's still out there, below the surface, fighting wave upon relentless wave. Maybe she's waiting for someone to relight the carefree spark in eyes now filled with saltwater.

"No sweets."

I don't really like them anymore anyway. My hands absentmindedly stroke the stoney sand.

"And she is NOT to go in the water."

I kick off my shoes and brace for the chill of the sea.

COVID Crawlers

It was an ominous and ice cold day in Leith. I was wrapped in the all the ripped rags I could scavenge. I could hear the distant screams of the victims of the covid crawlers. They are little angel like shaped beasts, with fangs that could rip through your skin like a knife going through a potato.

I still remember to this day when covid hit us. It changed everything. There was no going back from the horrible and dark disease. The doctors tried all they could for the cure. But then it happened. The cure turned into the disease. There was no going back from what happened after that.

The crawlers have a way of attack that's impossible to read. They are cold stone when hidden but will attack at a speed quicker than light. The time had just gone 5 and I needed to get home before the real army of the crawlers came out. How they became these beasts? Nobody really knows except it was supposed to be a cure for the disease that affected us 4 years ago. COVID. But it most certainly went wrong.

From what I had found it seemed as if it was only me from my family left in this cruel world. My mum, dad and brother were all gone. Still as statues in our living room. I never know if it's safe to stay there but then again there is nowhere else to go. I had almost made it home, the night growing darker by the second. Thunder growling like a rumbling belly. I knew what was going to happen. I was almost home only 2 more quick blocks. But then "SCREESH". The night crawlers! They were out...

Noah Stewart-Brown
Trinity Academy

The Water of Leith of Consciousness

The cave is moist,
fecund, and,
outside the Volunteer Arms,
the results play.

Smears of shite, canine,
rest with beer-
stains on 'society',
and are washed
to the Firth by
tedious torrents,
as bus-catching catatonics,
amid gamp-phalanxes,
wait
for buses.

Little eye-contact, but
oh no (there's always one)
that smelly wee bastard is
gawping at me.
Not at me, though, above me.
I have a halo.

Look away, wee man, nae Saint me!

We span Junction Bridge
and as I pretend to crossword,
a cadaver corrodes
covertly
beneath, among the Coke cans and the condoms,
in the cool mercury roils
of this hotbed,
ignored

by the swans-inscrutable,
who have always had the
good grace
to ignore
such
distasteful
minutiae.

Garry Stanton

A Full Life

Moving country, then house, then school, quite a lot for someone's first 12 years of life. It started off in Bucharest, Romania.

A normal boy living a normal life growing up, going to preschool, but then, but then, dad leaves to Scotland, 2 months later the boy and his mother join him.

Now, a new country, new language, no friends. The boy learns English and makes friends, but his parents want a place they can call a home.

A long and arduous year ensues, looking at house after house after house, until they found one in Leith.

A dainty little place in Leith by the sea the perfect size for a family of three, great neighbours, and great views.

Tudor Serban
Trinity Academy

A New Family

I travelled 23 miles to get to Leith. I can't just leave my past behind.

Smiling faces, waiting on me.

"You're safe with us," the woman smiled, holding out her hand.

I clutched on to the door handle. I didn't want to betray my parents, but they've betrayed me. When they left me alone for weeks, kept me awake for days and neglected me for years. Is leaving my past behind me is the right thing to do? These people can care for me like my parents never did. The woman's shining eyes, the man's loving smile. These could be the people who take me to school, who help me with my homework or who'll look after me when I need their help.

"It's okay," the man said, "we will take great care of you."

I shuffled out of the doorway slowly and took the woman's hand, mirroring her reassuring smile.

Francesca Campopiano
Trinity Academy

When it's over

No walls, no fences
will be found,
when finally man
is underground,
when the statues
have all tumbled,
when the concrete
has all crumbled,
when threadbare flags
wave no more,
and the last plastic raft
reaches the shore,
and when the sounds
of men have gone,
let the skylark
sing its song.

Dan Brady

The Auld Hooter

Walk around the Ocean Terminal today and you'll see hundreds of tourists visit the Royal Yacht Britannia or maybe spend a few hours shopping or having a bite to eat. The only noise you'll hear is of congested traffic and the ringing of the tram as it heads towards Newhaven.

If you had been standing in the same spot forty years earlier, you would have witnessed a completely different scenario, especially if it was 7.40 in the morning.

You see that's when the Auld shipyard siren or Hooter as we called it began its morning call to remind all the shipbuilders to get to work. It wasn't just the shipyard workers who checked their watches or set it as a time to get out of bed and go to work, this hooter was loud enough to wake even the deepest of sleepers from their slumber in the Port.

The Auld siren had some history to it. It was used to warn the shipbuilders and those around the area to take shelter during the war when enemy planes would come up the Forth to drop their cargo of bombs around the Forth estuary.

Operated by a team of timekeepers the Auld Hooter would go off with the precision of Big Ben, to the second. The timekeepers took their jobs very seriously indeed. So much so that if you did not make it through the shipyard gates by 8 o'clock, you would be locked outside until dinner time, losing half a day's pay.

To get into the yard, there were several gates just like the old turnstiles at a football ground. Behind each was a timekeeper who handed you your own personal numbered brass chitty. This allowed the timekeepers to know who had turned up for work that day. You would leave the chitty at the gate if you went outside the yard at dinner time picking it up on your return.

Each day like clockwork the Auld Hooter would blare out throughout the Port. At 7.40, 12.00 dinner, starting back at 1 pm and finally at 4.40 pm going home time.

I remember it was a cold and very grey day just before Christmas 1983. Most of the workers had taken redundancy and the yard was nearing the end of 700 years of shipbuilding in Leith. The Auld Hooter blasted off one last time. For me, it was the end of a great era for the Port and folk of Leith. Like my family, the yard runs through the DNA of many families who were employed there for generations.

So as you walk around the docks, take a minute to imagine the noise coming from the shipyard. The hammering from long-gone trades such as the caulker, and riveter, and the past sound of banter amongst the workers. Not forgetting the Auld Hooter signalling out a time in the past when we built ships.



I am the young lad to the right. This photo was the last photo ever taken before the yard shut for good.

Lawrence Dinse

Make your bed before leaving the house

... or if you get hit by a car, the police will inspect your room and say, this is the kind of woman who does not make her bed. They'll hoist you into the small white room and ask: *When was the last time you changed your sheets? The last time you fed a bird? When, tell me, was the last time you prayed?* This room is in the Arctic, by the way. Outside, the Northern Lights are beautiful without aiming to please. When dawn comes, wrapped fox-soft in scarves, you'll wake, found in your bed, as though it is your first day of school...

Piety

Before I leave the flat I grab my umbrella.
Somehow its canopy has turned to flesh.
I eke my way down the street, holding it high.
Near its tips and ribs, the veins run redder,
while at each gust, goosebumps raise overhead,
and when rain pelts hard, it sags and sighs.
As the sun comes up I see it better:
translucent now, the membrane stretches,
and I bask like jadestone under light,
so jelly-warm, pellucid—

Wood-pattern

When summer came so did the termites, and we made a game of catching them, placing them gently on tissues. They didn't move, not after being caught: they lay flat, brown as buttons; defeated or perhaps uncaring whether they lived or died. We had not yet learned to be afraid. Though termites slid out of crevices like insipid words we could not find them ugly. It was not in our disposition.

*

In your call you tell me you are frightened. This fear follows you, you say. I don't think there is anything I can do. We heave and turn the past inside us as though it had bedsores. Pain is tight on my face. In your voice I hear everything: our selfish colossal childhood, how we were one thing, one thing with four hands

*

Sometimes they come out of the sofa. They bite the back of it, the table legs, even the cabinet we are not allowed to touch. So quiet in the pattern of wood. Maybe we will line them up in a row to count. Maybe let them go. That's for another time, we know, and maybe later we'll forget they were here.

Gabrielle Tse

The Day My Colour Changed

I remember the day my arms went weak,
The day my bark went brittle.
The way everything changed so quickly,
And the changes weren't so little.

I remember the day my hair fell out,
The day my trunk felt thinner.
The wind around me thickened,
As the leaves around me linger.

I remember the day the time went slow,
The day all motion stopped.
It all hit like a ton of bricks,
Like the world around me swapped.

I remember the day the people left,
I took them all for granted.
My presence felt so empty,
It just got all too slanted.

I remember the day my colour changed,
All summer I stood so dutiful.
The sudden insecurity,
They lied when they said, "autumn is beautiful".

Ninarosa Gunson-Milne
Trinity Academy

Winged Horse

The long hot summer of 1976 will soon give way to the usual
damps and frosts of autumn. Prime Minister Callaghan will let
the electric fires go on, all three bars, let sleeping dogs lie, let the
mines and the docks clatter on, shift to shift. For now.

The horse and cart, man and boy, pied pipers of scrap, thread
from street to street along the line of the Colonies. All the
mangles and tin baths are gone now. Metal has given way to
plastic. Their song drifts over the heat haze:

Rag and Bone.

Ragbone.

Ragbone.

Half-memories are already settling around the sea-change:
do you remember thrupenny bits; do you remember leaf tea;
whatever happened to the rag and bone?

The horse shambles past the terraces of back to backs, the
narrow streets plang-planging with children's running feet.
As the sea haar burns off, the Links are rumpled and creased
between the grey hutches of the Colonies and the sooty dockside
works. Man and boy plod beside him, onward to the loose circle
of caravans and Transits at their camp beyond Seafield.

The boy unbuckles the crusted webbing from the giant head

of the cart horse. He releases him from the blinkers and rubs his shoulders, still sweaty from the collar. The horse tweaks his hairy ears, one backwards, one forwards. He waits until the boy is gone, then creaks towards the scrappy grass on the verge. The boy goes to wait outside the Tavern for the man, the rag and bone man, who drinks away his cares, until he is kicked out. They return to their caravan and the treacherous new transit parked beside it.

In the morning, the man looks out from his shack. He is an enigma, raincoated and booted no matter the weather, the boy can't read his ruddy weathered face. The boy breathes the tangy must of the horse and the tack hanging loose, with the ancient army blanket, cut for a saddle cloth, oiled smooth with horse sweat. Life with horses has required few words. The man's silence suits the boy. His throat aching and his limbs heavy. The man gives a nod.

The boy moves to the cart horse waiting patiently for another day of rag and bone, rag and bone.

The boy is tall and spindly under a filthy donkey jacket. He has been shivering since the man pulled him from his bed just after dawn. They have walked the line, from camp to street, from camp to camp, all their lives. The boy buckles the bridle onto the giant head, gently unfolding the ears from the leather and teasing the forelock into a tidier fringe. He pulls on it until the horse's nose pushes into his chest. The horse's brow rests against the boy's roughly shorn bonce, shifting the weight of his massive black rump from one knee to another, his haunches creaking from the years of toil. Gently, the horse snorts warm breath through his velvet nostrils to warm the lad's chest.

The boy's rough hands frame the horse's cheeks, and he whispers, his lips moving around words that maybe the horse can understand, or maybe not, the secret is between them.

Behind the lad, a bolt slides, clicks, is ready. The man, solemn, his leather waistcoat open, allows a chill to wrap around his barrel chest, hollow with dreadful duty. He looks off to the horizon, past the rise of cranes and chimneys at the docks, to where the wasteland at Wardie Bay would be, where the horse once gambolled like a fawn on Sundays. He raises the dull steel of the rifle level with the boy's head. The roughness of the man gives way briefly to a sound from deep within him, almost feminine, a gasp.

The boy's eyes squeeze shut. He feels the gun raised behind him. His battle-scarred scalp contracts. He makes a monumental effort to break the inertia of muscle, sinew and bone holding him fast to the horse's trusting lips, which he now twitches, seeking the hand he expects will be offering up the bit for their day's graft together.

Finally, the boy steps aside, eyes closed. He hears the shot. The air rushes out of the falling hero and the ground compresses as it receives the carcass. The lad hears a spirit rising, wings beating a rhythm for the horse's new song. Time's come, time's come.

Ruth Campbell

The Shore

Beneath the shore, where shadows play, a whisper stirs the
river's noise,
from depths unknown, the timeless change.

Currents shift and shores reborn, the river, a mirror, old and real,
its timeless dance, a constant guide in every swell, the world's
secrets hide.

The flowing tide, for in its waves new worlds sit,
the river's song both wild and strange, in every wave a sea
change.

The girl stood above the river, the water crashing below her, the
wind whistling,
She watched as the stream changed, much like her life.

Eva King
Trinity Academy

The Princess in the Tower

*Bombs are dropping,
the sky is black;
bones go crunch
and branches snap.*

*People won't know,
people can't see;
but when you get lost
they'll plant a tree.*

*You can run and hide,
and cry and scream;
but you won't wake up
from the witches dream.*

*Beneath the ground,
they hide away;
but if you go missing
you'll be here to stay.*

The children's chant filtered through the playground fence and into the park. Though Alice kept her vision trained firmly on the path ahead of her, she could not help but listen to the twisted rhyme. It was a new one. Modern. What had happened to Ring-A-Ring-Of-Roses? What happened to Oranges and Lemons? Older rhymes were similarly bleak in their content, but the black death and executions were in the comfortably distant past. They did not lend quite the same level of chill to the already fresh November air. The path was treacherously icy, but she increased her pace.

Victoria Park was oddly empty (at least of people) for this time of day. Alice had walked here many, many times over many, many years. A curious child. A confused teenager. A stressed student teacher. A focused professional. And now a bored retiree. Were she to close her eyes she could visualise the park almost perfectly. Just as easily as she could see any of those past versions of herself. The one thing she simply could not envision was what to write next.

Alice turned abruptly on her heel. There was a singular change that she really struggled to process, even after all these years. A big gap in the sky marked where the tower block of Trinity Academy had once stood. It had been an ugly building. And yet she had been fond of it. A person could be conventionally unaesthetic, but still have character and presence. Surely the same could be applied to buildings.

For a moment Alice regarded the space where the tower block had once stood. The park and surrounding areas had gone through many changes over the years. But they had been gradual. Fluid. The demolition of the tower block had been sudden and jarring; the space it left behind was as awkward and permanent as a missing tooth. After a moment Alice realised she was drawing in short, sharp breaths. Her backpack was not physically heavy, yet it seemed to strain her shoulders. She was some distance beyond the playground, but the rhyme was still vaguely audible. Her head had flooded not with thoughts, but with feelings. The anxieties her teenage self would come here to escape. The euphoria her child self would come here to indulge. The sense of closure her young adult self would come here to find. Alice cast her back on the school buildings and broke into a run.

Wary of the paths in the icy weather, Alice moved onto the grass; it was coated with frost and yielded with a satisfying crunch underfoot. A row of particularly sturdy trees loomed at the periphery of her vision. Even when she had been a very little girl they had stood tall. Over the years she had come to regard them as old friends. They had always been there. They had always been tall. Even when stripped of their leaves they looked proud.

Alice raced towards the most exposed area of grassland. A stitch opened in her side. Her breaths had become shorter still. Eventually her pace faltered. She made for a metal bench in the middle; too tired to pay any heed to the much younger woman who sat there. She did not care. She needed a rest.

“Training for a marathon?” They remarked as Alice sat down.

“Writing a novel,” Alice huffed as she took off her backpack and sat down. She had run a marathon whilst at university. What would her twenty-something self think of such a lopsided run? “Trying to shift some writer’s block.”

“By running round it?” The words should have sounded mocking, but they were tempered with empathy.

As her breathing returned to normal Alice turned to the woman on the bench. She was eerily familiar, yet she could not put a face to her name. “We have met before?” A cautious statement in the guise of a question.

“I hope so,” the younger woman adopted a submissive tone. “You only taught me for four years.”

Alice felt her heart sink. She had always been very proud of her memory. She had always been able to remember students from decades ago. Entire classes. Today Alice had discovered just how much her pace had slowed; were her cognitive faculties in decline too? She chewed on her tongue and studied the woman's face. "You do look familiar!"

"Harriet," the young woman offered.

"Harriet... Harriet... Harriet Thisk!" Of course. It all made sense. "Fantastic short story writer!" As though in a way of apology Alice found herself trying to demonstrate how well she remembered the young woman. "You were going to submit one to a magazine..." She faltered. "But your mother said no."

"She said no to a lot of things." The younger woman's voice reduced to a simmering hiss. "She didn't want me playing hockey. Or going to a uni outside Edinburgh. Or going travelling."

Alice stopped; a much younger, more excitable version of herself threatened to hijack the conversation. "And yet," she spoke slowly. "I sense you did all of those things." Another pause. "Did you feel she was being protective or smothering?"

"Both."

"She's dead now, isn't she?" Another statement worded as a question.

"How did you know?"

"Because the same thing happened to me, and you know what?

I didn't cry at the funeral." There had been a time and place for those feelings, but it had not been there. Everyone had thought Alice was strange. That her own way of processing her grief had been inappropriate. The young woman radiated such conflict palpably. Alice wanted to tell her all these things, but she knew better. If Harriet wanted to talk about her feelings she would say as much.

"I'm trying to write about it." Harriet spoke after a lengthy pause. "Not as a story or anything, just I... I usually find it easier to process things that way." There was a despondency to her tone. "I guess you could say I've got writer's block too." Her sombre expression dissolved into a thoughtful, but wounded, smile. For a fleeting moment Alice could see the student she remembered.

"Taking a walk sometimes helps."

"Does talking?"

"With the right person," Alice offered an olive branch.

Harriet rose from the bench. "Care to walk with me?"

"Where are we going?"

"Steadfast Gate, there's something I want to show you."

II

The pair engaged in small talk as they left the park. They passed beneath the bridge that joined the cycle track. In days gone by the chorus of traffic passing above would have been audible. For

a moment all Alice could hear, beyond their own voices, was the echoed bounce of their footsteps. As they emerged on the other side of the bridge birdsong filtered in.

Harriet did most of the talking; much of the conversation was based around the University of Strathclyde and living in New Zealand. Alice listened politely, but she was quietly aware of their changing surroundings. The trees in Victoria Park had increased in both number and size, but there was an orderliness to them. The trees beyond the bridge, by contrast, looked to lurch and leer; the once smooth tarmac had been warped by the aggressive progress of their roots. Even the blunt axe of winter had done little to tame the wild.

"I smoked my first cigarette at Steadfast," Harriet remarked as the elevation levelled off.

"That's funny," mused Alice. "I did too... We're not going there to smoke are we?"

"No, no! I'm cutting down!" Harriet insisted as the turnoff to Steadfast Gate came into view. "Definitely, definitely cutting down."

"Maybe we should keep walking?" Alice suggested.

"Maybe we should!" Harriet agreed.

They continued past the turnoff and took a left as the path sloped down. The faint chatter of the river could be heard nearby. Harriet came to a sudden halt and pointed up at the red sandstone wall. "This is where I had the idea for that story," she

explained. "The one I tried to get published."

"From what I remember it was a subversion of the fantasy genre." Though deeply invested in reaching out to her former student, Alice was quietly aware that ideas were forming in her head.

"A princess in a tower guarded by a dragon, with a chad knight trying to rescue her. This was her tower. On summer evenings she could look out across the river and marvel at her kingdom."

"Whilst smoking cigarettes?"

"And other things."

Alice knew better than to object; Harriet was no longer a student, and she was no longer a teacher. Instead she continued with the story. "From memory she had locked herself in the tower on purpose. Needed the peace and quiet."

"What would you do in her situation? Trying to broker peace with a belligerent neighbouring kingdom, loads of legal texts and treaties to read, and this idiot knight keeps trying to steal you away."

"I can see why she hired the dragon." Alice mused.

"You would do the same?"

"I would absolutely do the same!"

Harriet turned in the direction of the river and Alice followed her gaze. Though the sky was starting to turn a darker shade,

the city was visible through the barren trees. They stood there for what felt like an eternity. The air became noticeably colder. Eventually Harriet spoke: "C'mon, let's keep walking."

They made their way through a barren tree tunnel. Aside from the occasional chirp of birds it felt utterly desolate. The river disappeared behind a row of buildings, taking its chatter with it. Alice knew what she wanted to ask but felt decidedly uncomfortable asking it. They passed beneath a bridge. They walked on further. There was no one else on the walkway. Virtually no birdsong. And no sound of traffic. The silence formed a pressure that added to the weight in Alice's backpack. They passed beneath another bridge. Eventually Alice caved in: "The knight. Who was he based on?"

"Just some self-professed ladies man. I was never on his radar, but he bothered some of my friends. Bad revelations came out about him after uni."

"Was he charged?"

"Wiggled free. Most of them do." Harriet bit the words off. "But everyone knows what he's about now. Think he moved to Perth or Stirling. Basically he's in exile."

Alice did not need a name. She knew exactly who it was. Exile was better than he deserved. "What about the dragon?"

"You know who that's based on."

A fiery temperament, an intimidating presence but, ultimately, a commitment to do what was right. "So, you don't hate her?"

Harriet tilted her head up towards the brittle branches overhead. "A lot of the time I think I do. And then I think I hate myself."

"I felt the same," Alice offered. "I still do. Sometimes. When I write, or I try to write, I find myself reaching into the past. Reliving memories, picking at old wounds that should have healed."

"It's like a storm!" Harriet's voice cracked. "It's like a big, raging storm and then, eventually, it settles. But guilt rushes to fill the void left by hate."

"And that's absolutely normal. For years when I thought about my own mother, it was dark, stormy skies and thunder. Not constantly, but most of the time. Eventually they started to disperse."

"You've forgiven her?" Harriet asked.

"Of course I have, but it takes time."

"Have you forgiven yourself?"

Alice blinked hard to clear the stinging sensation from her eyes. Again her backpack felt frustratingly heavy. "That was even harder... Honestly, since I started this novel those feelings have come back with a vengeance."

This time it was Harriet's turn to console. She put a hand to Alice's shoulder. "There's one more thing I'd like to show you."

III

For Alice the squat, weather worn headstones were as difficult to look at as a mouth of decayed teeth. In summer months they would have been pleasantly veiled behind a wall of foliage, but in winter they were impossible to avoid. She winced as they loomed into view, and promptly cast her gaze down to the river. As in Victoria Park she knew the route step for step. But she kept her hand tight on the side rail, and her eyes fixed on the water; there was still just enough light to see her reflection. "Makes my skin crawl," she spoke more to the older woman who stared back at her from the water's surface than to the young woman by her side.

"I know what you mean," Harriet remarked as though eavesdropping. "Cemeteries don't normally bother me. But this one? Even the grass and trees look miserable... I'd hate for my bones to end up there."

Though Alice kept her eye trained on her reflection, Harriet's description reinforced the image of the burial ground in her head.

Harriet continued: "When I was very little we used to drive past it every week on the way to Asda. I think it was the first time I became properly aware of death." A pause. "I like Warriston though."

Alice felt the ghost of a smile form on her face. Warriston was so vibrant and leafy. So gorgeously overgrown. It made her think of renewal and regeneration, not death. "It's funny," she heard herself say. "When I was sixteen I used to smoke weed in

Warriston. One time I found this tombstone. Sixteen. Can you believe it? This poor girl was sixteen! And do you know what I did?"

Harriet said nothing.

"I stole her name. For my writing, you know. I used this dead girl's name as a pen name."

They walked on for a time in silence. Confident that the burial ground was now in the distance behind them, Alice lifted her gaze to take in the Shore. The buildings ahead were older than any others she had seen that day. They came to a bridge and, this time, crossed over it rather than under it.

It was Harriet's turn to break the silence: "Stephen Reid, remember him?"

"Sweet boy; very daydreamy." Alice could envision him perfectly. "Great imagination, but his ideas often ran away with him." She had always been fond of Stephen, but he had been so difficult to reach. There had been so many students to look after, so many needs to meet, so many disruptions...

"He's doing fine now," Harriet said assuredly. "He joined the creative writing society at uni, turned out to be quite a prolific writer! He wrote this crazy seafaring story," Harriet gestured across the water. "And this was his inspiration."

Alice peered down at her own reflection. "Tell me more."

"He had this way of describing places. Towns and cities? They

were like living things; the buildings and institutions were the organs, and the roads and rails were the veins and arteries.”

“What about the people?”

“Microorganisms; blood cells and antibodies. We live short lives and we die.” She nodded back in the direction of the burial ground. “But the bigger thing, it keeps going; so long as we keep it going!”

Alice swung her gaze back to the buildings that lined the Shore. She had always thought of them as old and sickly. Ugly, shrunken structures of a bygone age. But as she stared at them now, they looked different. They were bright and colourful, and lit up the rapidly darkening November sky.

Alice thought of the tower block at Trinity Academy. It had existed for only a fraction of the time these buildings had been here. But countless waves of students had passed through; washed in on the tide of adolescence before being swept out to adulthood. Some had seemed like such strong swimmers, destined for success, yet they had sunk like stones. Others (Stephen Reid being a case in point) looked like they were going to struggle but had managed to stay afloat.

That poor girl in the cemetery. Had she gone to Trinity? Had she been a promising student? Her mind jarred suddenly to the war memorial that had rested in the basement of the tower block. It had been moved (very carefully) to the new building. And then there had been the traumas and catastrophes of the 2030s.

Despite the gloom Alice allowed herself a small smile. “Things I

could control,” she said quietly. “I focused on the things I could control.” She took off her backpack. It no longer felt so heavy. She had not been able to help every learner to swim, but she had shown most how to stay afloat. One last time she closed her eyes. She imagined holding a great, big stone over the water’s edge; guilt, frustration, sadness. All those feelings were locked inside it. She imagined loosening her grip. The stone disappeared beneath the surface without so much as a ripple.

“Thank you,” Alice giggled as she opened her eyes.

Silence.

“Thank you for helping me.”

Silence.

Alice looked around. The sky was much darker now. The lampposts were spilling bright light onto the pavement. There was no one nearby, yet she did not feel alone. The competing voices of past versions of herself had stopped trying to speak over one another. Alice made her way to a nearby bench, sat down and opened her bag. Inside was a writing pad and a pen. Alice opened the pad to a blank page and clicked her pen.

The Princess in the Tower Block (a sequel). She began her next story.
By Harriet Thisk.

Gavin Smith

Once Upon a Time in North Edinburgh

He stood looking out across the bay taking in deep breaths of salty air.

It was a grey still kind of a day, one of those days that felt lifeless, that sucked the energy out of everyone. For once the wind that seemed to be such a constant on this part of the east coast was absent.

He was standing on a stone structure known by the locals as the breakwater which pointed crookedly into the River Forth at Wardie Bay. The breakwater had seen better days. Dotted along it were two white-coloured buildings long ago left to decay and fall into disuse. In the past these buildings had been used by local swimmers taking an early morning dip in the grey waters that lapped around the breakwater. It was a tradition that had endured, regular swimmers still gathered most mornings throughout the year regardless of the weather.

He had even been one of them for a good number of years, but then he had moved out of the village up to Granton Road. It wasn't far but nonetheless he had never seemed to be able to overcome the short distance to return to the sea. The sea, that's what he called it.

Of course his more pedantic friend had to pick him up on that anytime he said it.

"It's not the sea! It's the bloody River Forth!"

He glanced at his watch, better be going. He took one last look around and sighed contentedly at the scene he surveyed. At least when so much of the world is changing you are always here steady, constant, always the same he thought.

As he walked away, he didn't notice the swirling and bubbling of water near the surface of the water. Nor see the strange shaped head that emerged briefly from the waves and then quick as a flash disappeared again.

On the surface perhaps things did stay the same but beneath the waves things were changing.

It was just as dusk fell that something made its way through the water towards land. As it approached the shore this something began to change from a body covered in scales, propelled by fins to one that was much more human-like with skin, arms, legs and when it stood erect was some six foot tall.

The creature emerged from the water and walked across the sand and pebbles. Then disappeared into a tunnel in the wall of what was an old disused railway line.

On the other side of the tunnel a man staggered from the Wardie Hotel, crossed the road and walked unsteadily into the tunnel. The creature heard what sounded like running water. It saw a figure standing with one arm placed against the wall holding himself steady as he urinated, steam rising from the ground.

The creature moved quietly along the tunnel and then with a leap was on the man, biting his neck, its mouth full with the warm, sweet taste of blood. The man fell lifeless to the ground. The creature looked at the clothes the limp figure was wearing. They looked a little bit small, but they would do until something better came along.

Just as the creature had finished dressing it heard a noise, it sounded like more footsteps coming into the tunnel. A new figure merged into the darkness. The creature fixed its gaze and saw that this figure was slightly taller than the last. It adopted a similar position to the first one, a hand against the wall of the tunnel to steady themselves, then the sound of running water. This figure started to make noises. The creature did not understand what was being said the words sounded odd, slurred 'Bloody useless', 'toilets', 'out of order' and then 'AAARGHHH!'

Although, this last sound emerged as the creature drove its fangs into the neck of the man who was soon lying dead on the ground.

The creature turned the body over with its foot, these clothes might fit better it thought. The shirt was much more colourful than the one worn by the first victim. This one was bright yellow, short sleeved and had large dark brown leaves on it. The trousers were a light brown colour and the shoes which had no laces were a light tan colour. These shoes were bigger and when the creature tried them on they felt comfortable. So, for the second time that evening the creature changed clothes. As it removed the clothes it noticed some markings on the arms of this larger body - YLT and YLT Ya Bas! This had been the first familiar thing that the creature had seen. It reminded it of tribes and warriors from its own world who drew symbols on themselves before they

went into battle.

The creature nodded its head in appreciation and then dumped the second body on top of the first. It hesitated for a moment, there was something around the neck of the second victim. A chain with a medallion, the creature held it up in the gloom of the tunnel admired it and slipped it round its neck.

The creature was eager to explore its new surroundings and walked out of the tunnel. It noticed a building on the other side of the road although it couldn't see through the windows it could see brightly coloured lights and heard voices.

A sign outside of the building said David Bowie Tribute night.

The creature heard a keyboard, guitar and then a voice stuttering at first but then singing the word 'Changes.'

The creature walked through the door of the Wardie Hotel on a night that would certainly bring change to all of those inside.

Things would never be the same again the night the creature from Wardie Bay arrived ashore.

Bernard Harkins

Sea Changes

The tide goes in and out
Life comes in and out of Leith
Life comes in and out of Leith like the tide that surrounds it
The tide comes in and out Leith

It washes away hope and sadness
It pulls in new people, new places new hope for the future
It also pushes out people, places and life
The tides push in and out
It evens things out in the area

The fishing boats decreased.
But the cruise ships that bring tourists have become more frequent
The wildlife has grown and the trams have been built
Ones that replace those that were there in the past

The sadness is evened out with the happiness
Which brings hope for the future as the sea changes around Leith

Eilidh Robertson
Trinity Academy

Long Walk

‘Come on, Ben. What’s up?’
There was no reply.
‘Ben!’

‘Nothing’s up, Cathy,’ he said finally. ‘I’m just going for a walk, that’s all.’

She stopped asking, just sat on the bed and watched as he finished packing. Can’t be going for long, she thought, he’s not taking much.

Once or twice he looked across to see if she was watching him. And then he was done, the drawstring of his old rucksack was tightened up and clips snicked into place.

That sounded final, she thought and then wondered why she thought it.

‘So...how long will you be gone? Where will you stay tonight? Will you phone?’

‘I don’t know for the first two,’ he replied, ‘and yes, I’ll phone. I don’t have any firm plans, Cathy, I just want to get some mountain air into me. I’ll head north for a while and then maybe go over to the Islands. I’ll see.’

He straightened up from giving a final tug at his boot laces and stood in front of her, the rucksack propped against one leg.

'How do I look?' he asked, smiling.

She tilted her head slightly to the side.

Not bad Ben, she thought, not bad at all.

'You look like the wild rover, dear,' she said. 'Boots, jeans, parka and that beard...keep it trimmed, will you?'

She felt tears come and didn't try to hide them.

'And you look like you're ready to leave me for good,' she added quietly.

He sat down next to her, they leaned into each other.

'Cathy, we've always said we'd give ourselves some space if we needed it --even if we never really meant it. But...I need to do this, I need to go, for a while at least. And you know I'll be back, you know that. It's not as if it's the first time, is it?'

She looked into soft brown eyes and saw tears.

Good, she thought.

'Wild rover, my arse,' she said. And he was right, of course, he had gone off on these rambles before.

But there was something else this time.

'How bad was the news then?' she asked, her voice steady.

'What news?'

'You left the appointment card in your jeans.'

He looked away.

'I really must do that domestic stuff myself sometime,' he replied.

'You should. I'll introduce you to the washing machine.'

There was a slight pause, a few heartbeats, before she spoke again.

'Looked like you were a regular, seven visits in two months.'

'Now then Cathy, what can I say, my secret's out. I have but one week to live, so I plan to make the most of it.'

'I won't bother with a birthday present then?' It was less than a month away, he would be forty one.

'A silver lining, I knew you'd find one. Listen, Cathy, that clinic is for all sorts of complaints, some of them serious I grant you, but I was there for a wee problem that's been building up over the last wee while.'

'Oh?' She tried to sound calm.

'Yes, nothing much really, but I get a bit breathless from time to time, I've mentioned it to you once or twice.'

'Have you?'

'I'm sure I did, anyway...'

'So, you get a bit breathless from time to time and you've just packed a rucksack to go tramping the hills. Kill or cure, is it?'

'No, no, listen...all they did was strap some things to my chest, shine lights in my eyes and then tell me there's nothing really wrong. Said I just need to get some exercise. And I *have* been getting lazy recently, too much time behind a desk and you've certainly noticed *that*. A good dose of Highland air will sort me out.'

'Aye, you'll catch pneumonia or freeze to death. I'm not sure I believe much of this, Ben, but you'll tell me the rest in your own sweet time. So, if you *are* going...'.
She gave him a light push.

'I love you too. I'll keep in touch, Cathy, I promise, as often as I can. And, please don't worry okay. I'll probably get as far as Inverness and think what the hell am I doing and be back on the next train.'

He slung the rucksack over one shoulder and they looked at each other, Cathy determined not to be the one to look away first.

I want him back here, she thought, safe and sound and he hasn't even gone yet.

'You better go, Ben. You'll miss your train and she'll be annoyed at you.'

'You're right about the train but you know fine there's no one waiting for me. There's just you, Cathy.'

'*Just* me! I'm more than enough for you and you know it. Get lost.'
'I'm gone,' he said and closed the door behind him.
Leaving Cathy wondering about the appointment card.
'You'd better bloody phone,' she said to the closed door.

What are the options? Ben had asked the specialist on one visit. He asked other questions, would there be an operation and if so what were the risks? What were the chances of a clean bill of health at the end of this whole sorry mess?

'Good,' said Doctor Revillo, 'we are starting to come to terms with our illness. It is a big step forward and will help you significantly. Together we will try and defeat it, hnn?'
We? thought Ben.

'Of course we will, Doctor. So, tell me, what *are* our chances?'

'It's difficult to be precise,' the specialist replied. 'I have to say that...up front, but we will do everything we can, together, yes? I mustn't not tell you this now, you see what I am saying?'

No, I don't, thought Ben, there's too many bloody negatives.
'It's a lot to take in right now,' he said.

'That is okay, that is normal. But if I give you this book will you read it for me? We can discuss next time. Will you read it?'

'Sure,' said Ben and took the book. He glanced at the title and then down at the author's name. Across the desk there was an embarrassed cough.

'Yes, my first book to be published. I am very proud of it.'

'Good for you Doctor Revillo, good for you. I'll read it carefully. Any laughs in it?'

'No, Mr. Lucas, no laughs. Some nice photographs, diagrams but no...laughs. I will see you next week, hnn?'

Ben read it and thought the doctor was right about one thing, there wasn't one funny line in the whole damn book.

As the train passed deeper into the Highlands and the distance between them increased, he thought more and more about Cathy. He took her photo from inside his wallet and smiled. As soon as he found somewhere to stay for the night he would give her a phone. Damn it, he thought, everything had been going so well.

And then.

Some time later he stepped carefully onto the platform at Inverness. Walking away from the train, from that solid line stretching all the way back to Cathy, he studied the people moving around him and wondered if anyone could tell he was dying, and how quickly.

As he left the station a line from one of their favourite songs arrived unbidden in his thoughts:

But I would walk five hundred miles...

Well, he thought, maybe not, but I might have enough time left for a hundred or so.

And then home.

Standing on the pavement outside the station, Ben marvelled at how quiet and peaceful the town seemed.

And with that he pulled the straps on his rucksack a bit tighter and set off to find somewhere to stay for the night.

Alistair Rutherford

Wings

Summer woke up like she did every day. She had breakfast like she did every day and went to brush her teeth like she did every day. Summer looked in the mirror and the toothbrush she was holding fell to the floor. She had wings. Soft feathery wings sticking out from her shoulder blades. They were huge! She tried to move them and they filled up the entire room. She hurriedly closed them and turned around. These wings weren't there yesterday when she went to bed so why were they here now?

"Mum!" Summer called from the upstairs bathroom in her little house on Abermouth Drive.

There was no reply.

"Mum!" She called louder "Come here!"

This time she heard footsteps on the stairs.

"I heard you the first time. No need to..." Then she stopped.

Her mum's jaw dropped.

"Summer? What? What.... What happened?" She asked in disbelief.

"I don't know. I just woke up and they were here." Summer replied.

"Come on. We're calling the doctor. Get your dad." Her mum said with conviction.

The phone call lasted for an hour. Summer, her mum and her dad stood in the kitchen, summer answering questions from her parents and the doctor. Eventually her mum hung up the phone.

"They can't give us an appointment until next week." Her mum told her dad.

"What do we do?" Her dad asked.

"I don't know." Her mum replied.

Their conversation continued but Summer wandered out of the room. Her little sister, Amy, who was seven and a half years old was sitting on the stairs, straining to hear the conversation. When she saw Summer her mouth opened and her eyes filled with sparkles.

"You have wings!" Amy said in wonder.

"Yeah." She replied tiredly.

Her little sister ran down the stairs to her. Amy started touching the blue and purple feathers now protruding from her back. She drew her hand away when they moved.

"They move!" She exclaimed.

"Yeah." Summer replied tiredly.

She'd been answering questions for the last hour. It was the same things on repeat. When had they arrived. Were they there before. Did they hurt. The same things over and over. She had ended up giving one word answers to the doctor until he hung up.

"Can you fly?" Her little sister asked pulling her out of her thoughts.

This sparked something inside her. Did they work? She didn't know. She instantly woke up, all tiredness gone.

"Do you want to find out?" She asked her sister and Amy's eyes sparkled even more.

"Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!" Amy exclaimed pulling her into the garden.

"Stand back." She told her sister who obliged in a heartbeat.

She didn't think it was going to work but she was going to try anyway. Summer moved her wings shaking them awake.

"Deep breath." She said out loud and heard her little sister breathe in and hold it.

"Not you, me!" She laughed.

Summer closed her eyes, took a deep breath and jumped as high as she could, moving her wings back and forth with all the strength she possessed. She braced for a landing. Ready to feel her feet touch the floor, but they didn't. She slowly opened her eyes and looked down. She was flying! Her feet were about a meter off the ground! She turned her head to her sister who looked like she was about to explode with joy. She tried to go higher. Pushing herself up and up. She felt she could fly forever but she knew she couldn't. Everything hurt and she was exhausted already. She was in the air. That was completed but now she had to get to the floor. She noticed there was a single pillow below her. Amy had brought it with her and put it down so she could land. It was a nice idea but it only worked in a seven year olds mind. Not in practice. She was a good fifteen meters off the ground. To fall now would hurt really badly or possibly be fatal. Wait. She just had to stop flapping her wings as hard. She did so and began to descend slowly. She kept her concentration until she felt her feet touch the floor. She turned to her sister. "Guess I can fly." She said but her sister gushed her heart out. "You can fly! Do it again! How can I fly? That was awesome!" "Yeah. I guess it was pretty cool." She replied smiling at the pure excitement in her sister's voice.

"Do it again!" Her sister responded, awestruck.

Summer's arms were sore but she was significantly less exhausted than she was a minute ago. She took a deep breath

and jumped. This time she kept going. Five meters. Ten meters. Fifteen meters. Twenty meters. She got to thirty meters and looked down. She swerved a bit in the air. She was so high up! No. She couldn't be scared or she would fall and that would be fatal. 'Just have fun,' she thought to herself. She dived around the tree in her garden. Twisting and turning through the branches the rain on the leaves wetting her hair. She felt unstoppable. As she approached the ground this time she grabbed her sister and pulled her into the air. Not high of course as she didn't want her to fall. Amy was now on her back laughing so much it made Summer laugh. She went higher into the sky. They were laughing and cheering as the wind flowed through her feathers. It was going perfectly until something awful happened. Amy fell off her back. Summer reacted in an instant. They had gone too high. She had gotten too confident for her own good. She dived down to catch her screaming sister, adrenaline pulsing through her veins. They were a meter from the floor when Summer narrowly caught her sister.

"Are you okay?" She asked Amy worriedly.

Amy didn't respond, tears welling in the corner of her eyes. She ran inside to her mum bawling her eyes out. Summer felt awful. Her sister. Her little seven year old sister had nearly died because of her. The guilt racked through her. Tears threatening to make an appearance. She had to leave. She needed some space to think. She saw her dad through the window comforting her sister and then noticed her mum approaching the door. They made eye contact through the window. There was a mixture of emotions on her mums face. Fear, anger and sadness. Emotions Summer couldn't name swelled in her stomach. Thoughts started to spiral; *is Amy alright, are they annoyed at me, do they think I'm a monster?*

That last one caught her by surprise. Her loving parents would think she was a monster. Am I a monster? She questioned herself, tears rolling down her cheeks now. She needed to leave for the safety of her family. So as her mum finally walked into the garden, shouting words to Summer that she couldn't make sense of, Summer kicked up into the air and flew away.

She flew for what seemed like hours but was probably only fifteen minutes. She didn't know where she was flying. Her only idea was away. Away from the people she loved. She almost killed her sister, for their safety she had to leave. Thoughts ran through her mind. She was alone now and forever. *No*. She thought. *Snap out of it Summer*. It was hard but she finally looked around and realised where she was. Wardie Bay. The place where her family had spent many a Summer afternoon. Why was she here? It was cold and foggy outside so there was no one on the beach. Unless. What was that? Summer saw what looked like a figure through the fog. They were sitting a good distance away on the pier. Near the end she was sure. She was going to leave, she should leave she told herself but curiosity got the better of her. She set her feet down on the pier and started to walk. She was exhausted so she decided to save her strength in case she needed to fly again. The rocks beneath her feet was slippery but she kept going. The sound of the sea in her ear. She kept walking. The figure seemed to disappear from view and Summer wondered if she should just leave but then the wind blew the fog and the person came into view. They were about thirty meters away now. She was so close when she stopped. This person. Who looked like a boy around her age had wings as well. Bright red wings with a hint of orange. She had been sure she was the only one. This realisation caused Summer to start running.

“Hello!” She shouted at the figure, “Hello!” She tried again and this time he turned.

A flash of realisation sparked in his eyes as well.

“You have...” he began...

“Wings!” She finished.

“I thought I was the only one.” He said.

“Me too!” She responded in excitement, all previous thoughts gone momentarily.

They talked for a few minutes and she discovered the boy’s name was Adam. They had both just woken up like this, thinking they were alone. They continued discussing their stories when they heard a timid female voice from behind them.

“Excuse me.” They turned and saw another girl.

Another girl with wings! Green wings that were beautiful. Over the coming hours more and more people arrived. They were all different but had one thing in common. They all had wings! They weren’t alone after all. The feathers were of all different colours and shades and the wings were all different shapes.

Eventually the group began to walk back along the pier, Summer and Adam at the front. Everyone’s wings out, together. Summer wasn’t alone anymore. When they reached the beach Summer heard a familiar voice and turned on her heels.

“Summer!” Her mother said joy and relief erupting through her voice as their family was reunited.

“I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to hurt Amy I just got over excited and...” Summer was engulfed in a hug before she could finish.

“I’m so glad you’re safe. Please come home.” Her mum said.

“You don’t think I’m a monster?” Summer said confused pulling back.

“Why would we ever think our amazing little girl was a monster?” Her dad asked.

“I almost killed Amy.” She pointed out.

“She’s fine. A little shocked but she’ll be alright. You made a mistake. That’s alright.” Her mum answered and Summer smiled, turning to her sister. Amy was poking Adam’s wings.

“These ones are red!” She said in awe.

I smiled. She was okay.

“What’s your name?” Adam asked the seven-year-old.

“Amy.” She declared.

“I’m Adam,” he replied.

She stroked his wings for another minute and then ran away to find someone else with cool coloured wings. I took a deep breath and exhaled. She was okay. Everything was going to be okay.

It was confusing. I was so relieved that my family was okay and I was glad that there were others like me but there was a feeling nagging me. A thought in the back of my head. I kept walking with my family all the way to my house, trying to ignore it but it was still there. I didn’t know how to get rid of it, how to make it disappear. The thought was completely irrational. It wasn’t real. It wasn’t real! The thought was very simple. One word swirling through my head over and over. It wouldn’t stop. I didn’t want to think about that word but it was overwhelming. One thought. One word. Monster.

Freya Jardine
Trinity Academy

Nothing Has Ever Changed

There will be no
Picking yourselves up
And dusting yourselves down,
No crisis talks
With the last gang in town.
Magic and music
Will be shot at dusk,
The prophets will recant,
Or return to dust.

The men of moderation
Have found their range.
Their gospel cries freedom,
But their deeds are strange.
'Nothing, my brother, is ever going to change.'

Against ashtray skies
No suns can wound,
Their plunder is the thunder
Of gods unbound.
When they kick at your front door,
And the gutter claims the stars,
Put your hands on your heads,
And lay down your guitars.

The men of moderation
Have found their range.
Their gospel cries freedom,
But their deeds are strange.
'Nothing, my sister, is ever going to change.'

In all the songs,
And in every painting,
Within frames of reference
Where truth,
Or at least cover versions of it,
Found courage, colour and voice,
At their margins and
In liminal shadows,
The men of moderation
Still whispered their range.
Their gospel cried freedom,
But their deeds were strange.
'Nothing, my child, is ever going to change.'

When we met
Beneath the canopy
Of the spreading chestnut tree,
We spoke of distant planets,
And how the future used to be.
When wise men cautioned
Against the opium of hope,
Was yours the first voice
To shake the heavens,
Your static ecstatic
In the schemes and prisons?
The bluesologists wept,
The last crossroads fell silent,
Songs and verses traded
For the currency of violence.

For the men of moderation,
Things fell apart.
Their tapestries unravelled,
Their fictions unspooled,
Their tracts now artefacts
In the shop windows of fools.
A Year Zero proclaimed,
A revision of range.
Now everything they knew, and
All that they claimed,
Is trapped in the aspic,
Of when everything changed.

Mike Cowley



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Enduring Leith spirit helps power change



Leith has seen many changes since I first moved here decades ago. Whilst it may feel like all has changed, the essence of who we are as a community and the strong sense of identity of Leith has persevered and, I would argue, is why Leith has been able to adapt and diversify throughout all the changes we've seen. This collection of stories lays clear how change has allowed us to build the diverse, vibrant and unified Leith we see today. We've grown stronger through the changes by maintaining that famous Leith spirit, which will endure for years to come.

Foysol Choudhury

MSP for Lothian Region, Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Culture and Communities

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