

A stylized illustration featuring a central figure in orange and yellow tones, standing against a background of swirling blue and white patterns. The figure has a face with vertical lines and a body with various geometric and organic shapes. Surrounding the figure are several abstract, dark shapes with internal patterns, resembling masks or faces. The overall style is graphic and expressive.

THE SILENCE IN BETWEEN

Anthology of Leith Writing

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Leith Writing

Leith Writing publishes an annual edition of Leith-related writing around a given theme.

The first edition marked the centenary of the municipal amalgamation of Leith and Edinburgh in 1920. Covid-19 prevented the launch in 2020, and we launched on 2 November 2021, 101 years to the day since the amalgamation was enacted.

Our first edition, *The Darting Salamander*, was numbered 101. *The Silence in Between* is the fifth edition.



Previous editions are online at www.leithwriting.com
Hard copies are for free distribution in Leith and beyond.

We rely on a healthy mix of local businesses, funding bodies, and personal donations.

Please consider supporting Leith Writing by donating via the website www.leithwriting.com or make a cash or card donation at Argonaut Books, 15-17 Leith Walk.

Foreword

I remember weekly visits to Leith as a child in the late 80's, where my Italian mother would come to buy her parmesan cheese and olive oil. Sometimes we would stroll down to the docks and wander about the large rusting cranes and industrial detritus of the ship building and commerce that had, until then, defined this place as Scotland's gateway to the world. I remember a very strong sense that something exciting used to happen here, and a boyish desire to see those cranes working again.

After moving to London in my 20s, I returned in 2016 to find the place undergoing an extraordinary transformation. Designers, artists and architects had taken residence in the boats and buildings that line the shore. I witnessed the opening of five breweries, two floating hotels, countless new bars and restaurants offering the best produce that could be found anywhere in Scotland, an extraordinary movie studio and our own Port of Leith Distillery; the tallest distillery in the world. Perhaps most excitingly for me, the derelict port had reinvented itself as a bustling harbour, full of epic cable-laying vessels and cruise ships. I got to see those cranes moving at last.

Leith today is less a gateway to the world, and more a great junction of worlds. Industrial and aesthetic; old and the new; international and domestic. Here they meet, rub against each other, causing friction, energy, light and extraordinary creativity. It makes movies, buildings, kilts, art, picture frames, food, beer, spirits, experiences, and joy. And it makes the words in this marvellous book.

Ian Stirling

Co-Founder, The Port of Leith Distillery

Introduction

This book represents the fifth in a series of Leith Writing, and perhaps represents an evolution in the thoughts of the area.

Whether factual or fantasy, the writings jointly embrace the intrinsic character which is particular to Leith. Leith now has a much brighter future than that which befell the area in the 1960s and 1970s, when the area felt abandoned in many senses. Leith has been reborn, with a very high ratio now of incomers, the New Leithers, who perchance love Leith in a somewhat different perspective, and do not mourn the losses of the past decades as these are unknown to them.

Leith's character is encapsulated in the words of its population.

Writing, the placing of words on paper, has always had a mystic quality, allowing the imparting of ideas and thoughts to other human beings, beyond the presence of the author and into the future. Writing is an essential part of what makes humans "human" and the invention of the alphabet and writing forms a pivotal step in the evolution of mankind. Such writing, when focussed upon a local area, such as Leith, can offer an insight into local culture and into the changing face of Leith. Whether people love Leith or hate it (yes there are some still) it cannot be denied that Leith has a very unique spirit. This spirit is not static, and changes as people come and go, as shops and restaurants open and close. Particularly on Junction Street, a few stalwarts have been there for decades, and are familiar to all Leithers, both old and new. They cater to the needs of the populace, epitomised

in such as "Anything and Everything" as noted in one of the works.

Indeed, it is hard to be indifferent to Leith, as its character is unequalled in any other town or area. The writers herein hopefully capture that unique character, when viewed together, and begin to explain what makes Leith "Leith". I think the writings reflect the population mix in Leith, which has become a melting pot of different backgrounds. The rapid expansion of Leith's population in pure numeric terms, will bring both good and bad consequences. Hopefully those coming to Leith afresh will love and respect the area, its people and its own local culture. The continuing evolution of the area will hopefully bring new talent to the area, and inspire more people to place pen on paper, expressing their emotions and anecdotes, inspired by life in Leith.

Stephen Dickson

Well known Leith historian and former planner involved in the revitalisation of Leith 1985 - 2010

Great Junction Street

Yesterday, I took a walk down great junction street, passing by trams, shops, and pubs. I strolled past buses, takeaways and numerous little junctions. I found myself wondering, “what if I turned left down this junction? Where would it take me?”

As I continued my walk, I couldn’t help but think about these streets, these decisions which could impact the rest of my journey completely. Each choice could take me somewhere utterly different, whether it be a shortcut, or it take an hour longer, all these choices leading me to new places and walks of faith. Pun intended.

Greta Parker

In Spate

Swathed in dank debris, Gormley’s figures struggle to keep their heads above water. 6 TIMES more than usual. Walkways inundated; impassable, impossible.

Spectators peer over ledges and bridges, inching towards precipices to catch a glance of the thundering ferment. Where’s it all going?

This is a day to be cooped up, snuggled up, hot water bottled up. An absorbing read, a comforting brew, a hearty stew.

Clouds clear and the rain finally relents.

But the rapid river rushes relentlessly onward.

Freshly formed sculptures of twigs, grass, and flotsam and jetsam embrace those railings that dare to jut out.

Grubby shorts hang at half mast, caught in a battered leafless bush.

The gurgling, whirling brown mass drives on, engulfing Gormley’s metal men.

6 TIMES over?

It’s all in the balance.

Will they wade to safety or be dragged down into the darkness, into obscurity?

Charlie Ellis

Dipper on the Water of Leith

Little Guardian

secret keeper of the shallows.

I glimpsed you busy at your watery work.

You were the colour of the winter river

water brown with Pentland soil and brilliant white weir spray.

You hop into the December sun.

I close my eyes and lean into its warmth.

I envy your easy connection to the river

the way you slip between shadow and water.

Teach me how to live in the shallows of the world.

I open my eyes

meeting your small dark gaze.

You puff up your feathers

fly off down river.

Sam Mills

The Bus Stop

There are bus stops on Great Junction Street that the numbers 10, 14, 16, 35, 49, 21 and 7 go through day by day. Whether the sun is shining, or rain is pouring down, we all gather at the bus stop to get on the same bus. We look at one another, knowing that nobody knows what turns in life you could be experiencing and how different everyone's life is. You may never cross paths with any of these people again or you might end up forming a bond or a friendship. One thing for sure, they will never walk in your shoes, and you will never walk in theirs. I now realise that is ok because everyone is dealing with something different, whether it is a jump to a new chapter in life or if you are struggling with something.

I sit at the bus stop on Great Junction Street and look at the faces around me. Homeless people sitting at corner shops not having a choice to be there, teenage girls my age on their way to town, families going into Baynes bakery buying pastries. Faces can tell a million stories and sometimes they are impossible to read. My junctions may verge in separate ways to theirs. Everyone has a unique experience to live but still, we all gather at the same bus stops on Great Junction Street waiting for our bus to come our way.

Ayla McKelvie

For Oscar

I jostle out my tenement, the smell of doner kebab meat curling in from the chippy next door. I cross the lights, cut through the Links, then keep straight, past Leith primary school. Small, round faces emerge from the gate, hoping to steal a glance of my sleeping baby. I press a finger to my lips and push on. Empty crisp packets and plastic bottles litter the path and every day I think what a shame that is. I scoop up a sweet wrapper and shove it in the bin without breaking stride.

I nip behind the Leith Dockers Club and down the short, stubby road with the cocktail bar on the corner, then onto the foot of Leith Walk and across the tram lines. As ever, the bronze statue of Queen Victoria keeps a silent watch. Here, I once saw a dog spin in frantic circles, like something wound too tight and ready to break. It wouldn't stop, even when its owner yelled, "Now, ya wee radge. Pack it in, it's time fur yer tea." Another time a seagull gobbled up a pigeon right in front of me.

I turn onto Great Junction Street, park the buggy outside Bayne's and eye up a glazed bun in the window. Skkkrrr-chhhhk, skkkrrr-chhhhk! Fast food riders mount the pavement behind me while men with tired faces stand in doorways, vaping. Sweet-smelling clouds fill the bus stop, I breathe deep and push on.

At the intersection where the road splits into Bonnington one way and Cables Wynd the other I cross again and pick up pace.

I see the Chinese takeaway and wonder why there are two websites on its shop front, not one. Should I ever meet Mr.Rice, I'll have to ask him. A postie with hamlike calves and a cocky smile waits outside the hardware shop, wipes his brow and hums a mysterious tune.

When I pass the bed shop where every day is a closing down sale, I know the route is nearly done. Panting, sweating now, I steer over the bridge and there it is: the Water of Leith. Suddenly blue tits dance in beech trees and there's the plish-plosh of mallards hitting water. Even the tunnel marred by graffiti holds a punk-like beauty. But there's still grit in my

shoes, the rattle of mopeds in my head. Without the roar and bustle from where I've been, this bit wouldn't hit the same.

Plonking myself on a bench, my baby opens his eyes and squints moodily. He won't remember any of this, I think, and the thought makes me sad. But we were here, I remind myself, walking in a part of the city that genuinely feels made for the foot, and that's good enough for us.

Evelyn Rose Worman

Wardie Bay

I stepped outside feeling grey
And closed the door behind me.
When you have a bad day
Go for a walk and let the breeze pull you away.

Walking down Great Junction Street
Lots of people out there to meet.
I want to see life and be free to explore
Go somewhere I never have dared to before.

Walking down Great Junction Street
It's like choosing between a cake or a sweet.
Which way should I go?
How should I really know?

Along to Granton or the Port of Leith,
I stood at the junction, feeling torn.
Both ways were pulling me
I could have sworn.

I smiled at the sunset
Then looked down at the ground.
I think I knew, I knew the right way
The breeze pulled me, towards Wardie Bay.

Maisie Hunter

Sailor's Train Home

A young sailor came back to the harbour, coming off the ship with the rest of his crew. There was a clock above the fish market that said 5 o'clock and below the clock, it said 1957. Hearing of the imminent closure of his favourite railway in the upcoming year, the sailor went to grab his lunch at the fish market. "I'll head to the station for the last time," he said to himself. "Oi, Bill!" one of his mates shouted. Bill ran to his mates and explained he was going to the train station because it was probably the last time that they would ever be there before the closure. All of his mates thought this was a grand idea. Bill was at that the station with his mates when after they had purchased their tickets and were standing, waiting for the train, Bill noticed a statue that he had never seen in the station before.

The statue was of a weeping angel and it seemed as if Bill was the only person who noticed it was there. He wanted to see it up close as he was completely captivated by it. He was so in awe that he didn't notice that his mates had moved on. He couldn't see that the train had arrived and he also didn't notice there was someone behind him pick-pocketing him. One minute later, after the pick pocketed had left, Bill turned around and realised that his wallet and ticket were gone.

When Bill looked around to find the guy who stole his wallet, he saw that the statue was gone. He then turned around again in disbelief and the stone statue of the weeping angel had reappeared and was only one meter away from him! Bill blinked and shook his head. The weeping angel was no longer weeping! It had a horrid frown, and its claws were reaching out towards Bill. All the passersby didn't seem to notice him nor the statue. Everyone was just walking around them and not looking at all. Bill was frozen. The weeping angel whispered to Bill, "God's will demands punishment." Bill's mind was searching for answers. He thought of what he could have done to deserve this. His whole life was flashing before his eyes, searching for a point at which he had branched off onto the wrong path. He thought that he was a good person, having always chosen the right path... the right way.

Ewan McKenzie

The Calling Through the Mist

The top of the bus was silent and empty apart from me. It wasn't the best day to go out, I guess. The sky was grey, and the air was cold and nipped at my fingers. The bus windows were foggy and translucent with steam, so much that I missed my stop. It took me a moment to work out where I was once I had stepped off the bus. An ocean of mist swallowed up the streets in all directions. I could only tell where the road was when the ghostly headlights of the traffic whizzed past me. I made my way to Victoria Park, although I could barely make out where I was. The music from my headphones seemed to swallow up my brain and I couldn't hear a single sound from the real world. My thoughts felt blurry. I hoped once I reached the water, I would feel better.

Suddenly a clear sweet voice cut through my muffled hearing and caught my attention. It didn't sound like a person, or a bird, it was almost ghostly. I glanced around but I couldn't see anybody. To be fair, I couldn't see much of anything through the mist. The voice called out again, this time louder. I started to feel uneasy. I felt like I was being watched, like I was prey. Then there it was again, the strange singing. I scanned my surroundings but still saw no one, nothing that could making the noise. Maybe I was imagining it. Slowly a cold bright light crept into my peripheral vision, then darted out in front of me. It was cat, or at least cat-shaped, but glowing luminously. I blinked but the cat

was still there when I opened my eyes, I wasn't imagining it. I thought it could be a trick of the light but the longer I looked the less likely that became.

I took out my phone, to take a photo, but on camera the cat was merely a patch of sunlight. I opened Snapchat and tapped Malak's profile to call her. I wanted to know if she could see what I saw. She answered quickly and I immediately told her the whole story. But just as I had expected, the cat didn't show up on camera so Malak couldn't see it.

"Yeah, there's definitely... something there. I believe you, I just can't see it right now," she said, but I could tell she was only being nice.

"Just trust me, I'm not crazy," I replied, but I did sound crazy. All this time we were speaking the cat stayed, staring up at me with piercing white eyes. I knew it was real. I said goodbye and hung up the phone.

The cat continued singing and began to walk towards the old railway. It looked back at me as if it wanted to me to follow, so I did. When we reached the edge of the dirt path, just before the Water of Leith I realised how wet the metal outcropping I usually walked along was. I'd walked that path hundreds of times before and had never fallen, but this time it seemed less safe. The world felt blurry, and my mind wasn't clear. I turned back, but I could feel the ghost cat tugging at my legs with its claws.

I wanted to leave but it stared at me with its bright white eyes, and I felt that I could leave it alone. So, I stepped out onto the first metal prong, very carefully. The cat, as if it was taunting me, leapt fearlessly across the water. So, I took another step. I could see the wet, shimmery surface of the metal and knew a misstep could send me tumbling down into the water. I contemplated the shallowness of the water and what really would happen to me if I fell. I could still turn back, and go home to safety, but the cat continued to sing, and I felt I couldn't leave it, not before it showed me where it was leading me.

So I stepped again, and again. I gained confidence and rapidly sped up. Maybe I had grown too confident, because when I heard the cat's song again, I lost my balance, skidding on the damp of the metal and tumbling down, down, down, until there was nothing.

Ada Smith

Just off Junction Street

feeling displaced, i wander down the Walk,
seagulls call overhead
soaring above the arches.
a tram bell clangs,
the smell of weed.
assorted shops in sandstone sell
fine wines and pipes,
chai lattes and sweets,
new books, used clothes,
Ancient Robot Games.

stickers and paint decorate my way:
Scotland in colour,
pay as you can,
nae bams,
doon yer tea,
bread loaf bandit,

queer anarchy,
free Palestine,
no Nazis,
no one is illegal,
trans joy prevails,
show some love,
we are all sawdust.

the people i pass are a fusion of sorts,
there's a willowy boy, tall and sparkling,
his pristine trainers, diamanté.
a short man in an orange-wool hat
pushes an old woman in her wheelchair,
they're chatting.
four young lads hide in dark hoods
and perch on a bench,
sharing pizza from a box.
a girl with curly brown hair

and a spiral-bound book
sits outside a café, exhaling raspberry vape.
a middle-aged couple holding hands,
hold back their tiny grey dog
who is yapping at the cyclists.
three emaciated figures drift by
with depleted smiles, they're disappearing
inside their jumpers.

i turn onto Great Junction Street next,
but the traffic stops,
locked in by the slow lights.
buses rev, a horn beeps.
i slip between the cars and side-step
around the corner. it's calmer here,
space to breathe.
and there, in front of me,
on a scrawled cream wall,

i see a mural – an elderly lady.
she's laughing, celebrating,
with a flower in her hat.
she's holding a graffiti can
dripping colour, pastel pink.
from it come pink hearts,
pink words, rising several feet –

♥ I hope you NEVER fit in ♥

i laugh along with her
and know that i am home.

Janine Walker



Artwork: The Rebel Bear

Where the Lighthouse Listens

The moon lighting the night,
Stars in the sky,
Blood on her hand that she washes away in the sea.
Her best friend just a light in the sky,
Gleaming when she looks up.

Sitting by the lighthouse,
The port where people come together,
Where boats meet at sea.

She is afraid of moving on,
Leith links or the shore.
People all over,
Starring in their own movie.

School starts in a week.
She is not the same.
A new life without her best friend.
The leaves change colour,
The wind blows cooler.

She is afraid of moving on,
But she might have to soon.

Arianna Haskins

Peace in Leith

I remember as a small child I would paint
Murals on the wall but they were washed away by the rain.
Growing up felt like forever, paint clinging to my sweater,
Practice every day, it don't even matter 'bout no weather.
Non-stop, I'm getting better.

We were bound just like tether, thought we had a bond
not easy to sever,
How nothing lasts forever, I know I'm not clever
I wrote my love for you, I must've forgot to stamp the letter,
So then we grew apart, a new life I'm trying to start,
Following a new star, I just hope I make it far.

Now I'm faced with these new options,
And I'm lost at all these junctions.
I'm just trying to find peace, looking for it over Leith
Up and over underneath, all the places I have been,
Searching for the unseen.

Ashton Henderson

The Junctions of Life

Junctions,
We've all come across them.
Some people cross right through them,
But for some,
It can be a path they aren't willing to take,
Or a road they don't want to go down.
And for others,
They're simply in a place in life they're happy with.

But for me and many others,
We just can't decide what trail we want to go along,
What lane we want to choose,
What leap we want to take.
It's not that we don't want to move on with life,
But more we're afraid of leaving the past
Or not wanting to turn onto the wrong track,
And live to regret that decision.

For some, help is what they need.
Simply writing their worries down can help them decide.
A supporting cast of pros and cons.
Taking their mind away from the big decisions,
Or the big junction in life's path,
For others just breaking it down might help,
Even speaking to a peer or someone near,
All of these ideas might just bring you one step closer to making
up your mind.

After taking that leap of faith,
there's always that wee voice in back of your mind.
You know, the one that is always saying
What if I didn't do that?
What if I took the other path?
Went down the other lane?
Would I still be in shame,
And not be the one to blame?

A change in direction is not something to fear.
Change is all around us,
It never stops.
Cities and homes are ever-changing,
It happens with or without us.
So don't be afraid of that other path.
Junctions are routes to the future,
And are where the past meets the present.

Clara Mansell

Ahead Only

Frustrated by rush-hour every workday
Out of favour with the traffic light gods
The lone red eye stares down with reproach
“Late” you say? Prepare to be later

Rear view mirror compensation
Familiar fellow traveller
Salutes shared but not names
After you

Parallel paths at this common exit
Intersection but no connection

Hayley Griffin

Great Junction

As a Leither, the words Great Junction shout out one thing:
Great Junction Street, the road running along the line of the old
medieval Leith wall. This road, more than any other, brings back
a life full of memories.

For me, it's running along Junction Street to catch the last session
in Vicky Baths. It's queuing along with hundreds of kids or rather
one big mad rugby scrum outside the State picture Hoose on a
cold wintery Saturday morning. It's walking along the Kirkgate
with my mum to pay for the telly rental (WE RENTED OUR
3 CHANNEL TELLY IN THOSE DAYS) or going into Woollies
for a pic and mix. Another Leith institute that was on Great
Junction Street was visiting the Leith Provident or the Provy
as it was fondly known to get your new school blazer on the
mutuality or payment scheme for those too young to remember.
Junction Street holds even more memories in the visits to the
old Leith hospital, once for my tonsils out and another when
wasps attacked me after sticking a burning piece of paper into a
hole in the ground down by shades the potato merchants at Fort
Place. It turned out that the little cut marks around my face were
not because of the wasps stinging me, but from my mates over
zealously trying to get the angry wasps away from me and hitting
my face with the zips from their heavy parka jackets.

For centuries, the Port of Leith has been a busy transient
place, where people have settled and called home and where
others have left and sailed to far lands such as Dunedin in New
Zealand's South Island. Kings and Queens have passed through
along with seafarers from all over the world. In the last years,

Leith has seen great changes; it has also come to a Great Junction in its future with many different viewpoints on what is the best direction to go. Something only time will tell.

Another use of the words “Great Junction” could also be used to reflect a time in our life when we come to a junction and choose a path. In the early 1800s my ancestor Captain Jacob and Henrietta Dinse brought their family from the Baltics to Leith, where they had a sailing ship that traded between the Baltics and Leith. Jacob and his wife had come to a Great Junction in their lives, a decision that set the path for every other Dinse living in Leith and other parts of Scotland today. The sad connection between Captain Jacob Dinse was that in the mid-1800s, he died in the Leith Poor house on Great Junction Street, where Taylor Gardens now stands.

So, for me, the words Great Junction bring back many fond memories of Victoria baths, Leith Provident and the Saturday morning picture show at the old State cinema and also remind me of the Great Junction that Jacob, Henrietta and their children came to in bringing them to Leith and sadly the poor house in Great Junction street.

Lawrence Dinse

A New Life

Just off the boat. Their marriage certificate had that as Kathleen's address. Stephen had watched her refold the certificate, place it with their only blurred photograph of him, her mother's letter and the three banknotes. Though what use Canadian dollars might be in Leith he couldn't fathom. She'd sewn a broad belt from her grandmother's unbleached linen tablecloth, tucked everything inside, sewed it shut with neat, pricking stitches. Her mouth had been tight, determined.

They stood waiting. There was no colour in anything. Not in the sky, not in the sea, not in the oily puddles gathered in the hollowed dockside stones. Not in her face. She'd already been sick, would be again.

'You're sure?'

'Yes.' That was all she'd said: yes.

'But you're still going?'

She'd taken his hand, kissed his calloused fingers, peered into him with her green-brown eyes. The colour of the Pentland hills in autumn, her eyes were.

'I hate it here. And now... I need my mam. I'm sorry.'

He thought she would cry but she didn't. He knew then how strong she was, and how weak, and how she would always be both.

The wind got up. It was colourless too, but sharp. He put his arm around her. She had on most of her clothes, the easiest way to carry them. Under their layers the linen belt swaddled her midriff.

'I'll follow you. As soon as I've saved enough. I promise.'

She nodded.

He wanted to say more, to touch her belly, but couldn't.

Debbie Bayne

Being Pressured

What are you meant to do when being pressured? I had to deal with this not too long ago, but I still don't know what to do. I was at Leith harbour just by that abandoned lighthouse watching the boats go by. I didn't know if I should join my friends, they all wanted me to join them, but I wasn't wanting to. The choice was mine, but it didn't feel like mine, I felt like I had to. I felt like I'd regret it if I didn't, or maybe that's just what my friends thought I would think, what they wanted me to think.

I was starting to think maybe a bit wouldn't hurt, it would be fine I told myself, but I wasn't sure if I could even trust myself in that moment. At that point it wasn't my decision anymore. I did it, just a bit at first but then again and again and again. I faced a junction of overwhelming odds and failed to go the right way, it felt like one way was all up hill and the other was all downhill, and I felt like I couldn't do it and just go up hill even though it would have been better.

I don't feel like I wanted to go this way, but I can't go back anymore, I can't remember a recent day that I didn't do it. I still remember the sea breeze on my face, watching the boat passing by, the sound of the water, hanging out at the lighthouse messing about while talking to my friends like it was yesterday. I remember it like I could still decide not to go this way, but I really can't, it's demoralising. This doesn't feel like my choice, it never has, I can't go back, and I feel almost trapped to forever go this path, I missed my opportunity to take a different path, to change my life for the better. I can't stop myself and I need help.

Orry Todd

Junction Bridge

A reaction to Keir Starmer's "an island of strangers" speech May 2025

A silver thread of everybody everything all at once

Maybe the smoothness of the skate park half pipes of swoosh
mosaics of colour with high vis vests
rumble of buggies and pound of running feet
globespinning voices and babies blanket-wrapped

Maybe the flap of pigeons in the Coalie Park trees
or the tent in the pitch of the sandstone arch
splurges of graffiti and tribal tags
copper Co-op dome Sikh temple spire
centuries of head stones folk from far away

Or maybe swims of cygnets
eiders and mallards wisps of laughter sips of beer
bugloss cornflower dandelions and thorn.

Annie McCrae

Decisions on the River

Water running, this way and that,
People walking, having a chat.
On their way to work, or going home,
Along the many river banks, people roam.
All alone or with a friend,
People will follow round the river bend.

Decisions to be made, big or small,
Thinking it through, one and all.
Horses used to trot these cobbled streets,
But now they are covered with littered receipts.
Kingfishers fly, hunting fish,
People walk by, making a wish.

Water running, this way and that,
Running below the many flats,
Decisions to be made, big and small,
Under the trees by the waterfall,
And all of this just shows,
That no matter what, the river flows.

Uma Amelie Behm & Meg Shearer

Reframing View

CRASH! CRUMBLE! CLAP! CRASH! CRUMBLE! CLAP!

The same overstimulating noises flooded my eardrum as I stood there at the Newhaven harbour, slumped depressingly over the edge of the rickety railing, staring at the crashing waves that crumbled back down after a moment of climbing. It was dark, stormy, and exhaustingly rainy to the point where it clouded my vision half the time if I tried to tilt my head upwards. Behind me, it was clear the restaurants and such were closing for the day as I heard miniature whispers in the background talking about closing and about the horrid, thundering weather. The old, beautiful lighthouse stood right to me at a 45° angle, its stance and gaze unwavering as the rude rain dreadfully dripped down its painted build. If I were lucky when investigating the wavy ocean, I would spot the occasional boat, clearly fighting to stay afloat in these crazy conditions. Though I knew they would stay up, all of them do.

I could not see much else. Then, my surroundings faded into obscurity and using them as a distraction, began to fail. I was stuck I remembered. Stuck between a rock and a hard place.

I couldn't pick between what classes I want; what I wanted my future to be. It was stressful which is why I came to this beautiful place. Except it wasn't today. Even the weather forecast didn't predict this. It just added salt to the wound. What science did I want? What expressive art did I want? What path did I really

want to go down? There were many options, too many. Looking at that old, shining lighthouse close to me, I took in its role.

What it was supposed to do. What it wanted to be. It may be rundown now, but it still did its' job. Looking around for ships, guiding them to the sweet safety of the enlightening harbours shore. It swept away the fog with confidence, letting out yelps of plea for the ships to stay safe, and overall being a vital part to show the boat driver where they had ended up. The lighthouses life ended well. It has remained, despite not doing a job anymore. It still has a vital role in the fishers' lives. I imagined myself stuck between not just two, but multiple junctions. Multiple paths with multiple ends. The lighthouse had one path with one end. It had the far easier life.

Though as the rain continued to pour, I cut off my train of thought, reached into my soaked pocket and pulled out my drenched phone. The blue light flickered on in an instant as I pressed down on a side button. The time flashed in front of my eyes. It was 10:32 PM. I really needed to get home; it was incredibly late. I adjusted my stance, standing upright as I started to walk along the stony steps of the harbour.

As I continued to walk, my feet started to feel heavy as I took one step after the other. I thought again. Why does it matter what classes I pick? I could always switch them out eventually. Why should I worry who I must be right now? Why should I care? I then realised I should just carry on. Be who I am. Pick the classes I enjoy. Have fun with what I have left of my childhood. I WILL make mistakes, pick the wrong choices, screw up even more. But that IS what makes me human.

Finally brushing away the terrible thoughts clogging my mind, I began to pick up my speed. Starting as a walk, transitioning into a jog, then finally into a full spring as through the multiple layers of thick fog, I saw my bus. The lights and numbers subtly gleamed through the dark of the night. I do not know where my life will take me. What job I will get it. What I will be to people, what I will do. But what I do know, is I should not worry.

The Junction

It was 5pm. In a flurry, I had left the house, heading off to grab shopping - my family barely saying goodbye. The 21 surges by, leaving me panting, covered in some unholy concoction of sweat and dirty water. Soaked head to toe, I shuffle in resignation towards the bus stop, the deluge hammering down on the faulty rain cover. As I wait for the bus, I watch an overflowing drain rejecting water in what seems to be sheer stubbornness. The pungent aroma of drainage hits me; sharp notes on top of an overall disgusting base. The bus finally arrives, leading me away from the downpour.

On the bus, as it leaves, the typical arrangement of coughing, phone calls and tinny music ensues. I put a mask on out of habit, blocking any potential bacteria-filled mists of saliva from entering my body. I sit uncomfortably, leaning forwards to prevent my back from colliding with the edge of the seat; the seats are encased in what seems to be multiple years of built-up grime. Dog hairs, beer spills - the whole lot. Finally, after an age of waiting at the lights, the bus begins towards my stop.

As I arrive at the Kirkgate, the sharp pang of alcohol begins to hit my nose. A piercing northern wind blows the fresh stench directly into my face. The penetrating ambience of drunken yells and busy traffic fill the air, not an uncommon occurrence. As I head towards Lidl I check my watch and when I arrive, I grab what I need - plus a pastry for myself. After checking out and leaving, I begin to munch on my pastry - yet something isn't right.

A seeping fog fills the area. I attempt to turn around, but the buildings have disappeared; I begin to panic. The permeating, undeniable silence screeches. As I hyperventilate, the world spins around me and I attempt to extract my phone from my bag. My shaking hands are no use and I begin to run. Charging ahead, I collide headfirst into something that wasn't there before. Stunned, I feel a warm liquid seep down my face and I taste copper. I dazedly limp towards another direction, any direction, but I just feel more buildings. My vision begins to warp, and I drop to the ground. As I hit the harsh surface, I twist my head and contemplate the pavement before me; a lamenting mass of concrete. Stifling fuzziness fills my vision; I fade away.

Two days later a newspaper shows the headline:

PASTRIES DRUGGED, BOY AGED 14 DIES,
FAMILY GRIEVING.

Mav McKinstrie

Singapore

"How would you feel about living here?"

Somewhere we have never been before,

I doubt it's as great as my dad says,

I don't want to go to Singapore.

I'd have to leave everything behind,

No nice trips to the docks anymore,

Leith links, the park I had always loved,

Please don't make me go to Singapore.

I would miss our walks along the river,

And my home, which I adore,

I'm not too sure about this idea,

Don't take me to Singapore.

It was going to be two long flights,
Almost fifteen hours, could be more,
I'd never been on a flight that long,
I'm not sure about Singapore.

A giant junction in my life,
All of my tears, they really did pour,
I miss all my friends very much,
But it's not that bad in Singapore.

Eilidh McNeil

Ringo's

I was in Leith on a beautiful summer day, the sun was glowing and reflecting off the bus window. I was passing the Great Junction Street; it never gets old passing it. Then I noticed a shop, it was called Ringo's, and I was thinking "huh that name sounds familiar".

Then I remembered it was a shop me and my family used to go to when I was little all these memories came back to me it was amazing like when we came to the shop for the first time all the staff was so welcoming and helpful.

Me and my family always went to Ringo's every week to buy food for the famous family Sunday dinner. It was hosted at my parents' house, and it brought my family lots of joy. I decided to get off the bus and have a quick peek in. I was walking down The Great Junction Street and remembered when me and my grandma bought the food ' it was always us buying the food since I could remember like when me and my grandma went out on a rainy day to Ringo's and she told me about all these different foods I never heard of before like how to cook them how to make sure they stayed fresh to this day that is one of the best memories I have ever had.

The staff were always kind to me and my grandma. I arrived at Ringo's and to my surprise it was the exact same staff working there. I went in and it brought back all these great memories the display of meat, the decorations, the floor pattern and it still had the same smell of all the wonderful food. The staff noticed me

and said, "Seb, is that you?"

I said, "Damn after all these years you still remember me"

"Of course we still remember you, all grown up, but we still see the little boy all those years ago" they said.

"How's your family doing?" the staff said.

"They're doing well - still cooking happily and enjoying life," I said.

"That's so great to hear," the staff said.

I said, "I'm so sorry to cut this reunion short but I'm running late for a job interview".

The staff said, "Don't worry just promise us you will come back to buy some food and don't forget about us when you become successful".

I said, "I promise I won't. I'll come back next week to buy some food - do you still remember the family order?"

"2 steaks, 1 chicken, 2 bags of fries and 5 portions of spicy wings" the staff said.

I was shocked. I blurted out, "How did you remember it after all these years?"

The staff said "Store secret. We'll tell you if you get that job, deal?"

"Deal" I said.

I left the shop with a sense of guilt but seeing the shop again it felt like a hole in my heart was patched and I made a promise to them – a fun fact about me? I never break my promises.

Sebastian Dragotta

A Leith Love Story

She didn't even want to go to the party. Looking back, Caitlyn was surprised that she was talked into it. Friday nights were generally reserved for cheap bottle of wine, a take-away and falling asleep in front of a tv show she was only half-interested in.

Jenny mentioned the party when they met for coffee a couple of weeks before. Some guy she knew from her art class was leaving for Australia and having a thing at his flat before he left.

"Some guy? Caitlyn raised an eyebrow. "It's never just some guy with you."

Jenny shook her head "Well this time it is. He is in his forties and I am not interested, but the party might be a laugh. His pal runs a tapas bar in Newhaven and so there will be lots of food and drink. Steve and Alyssa are going as well – it will be fun."

Steve and Alyssa were not, in Caitlyn's opinion, fun. It was Alyssa who got Jen into the art class in the first place. They were always going to some gallery opening or hot new play and whenever anyone mentioned an event or an artist, they had already been there or met them. Caitlyn once made the mistake of telling them she was going to a book signing – local boy made good Ken Hutchison had just published his first novel. Immediately, Steve told her about seeing him a year before at his first public appearance.

"Just short stories then, he was still working on the novel, but

you could see he was going to get there. We hung out with him afterwards – his girlfriend was so funny wasn't she, Lys?"

"Yeah what a night – we went to that wee bar off Bernard Street. Ken knew the owner so we got a lock-in. I'm glad he got the novel published – he was talking about giving it all up and going back to work at that insurance firm, wasn't he? Dunno how people do that – just slogging away at some faceless institution for years. Must be soul crushing."

Caitlyn couldn't work out if this was a dig at her job, which she had been doing for years at a faceless institution. To be on the safe side, she changed the subject.

"Do you want me to get him to sign something for you?" Caitlyn asked.

"Oh no, that's so sweet of you but I don't go in for *memorabilia*. He is such a sweetheart isn't he Steve? Such an old head on young shoulders. Tell him we said hi!"

Alyssa had said 'memorabilia' in such a patronizing way that Caitlyn wanted to reach over the lunch table and stick her head in her Tuna Ceviche.

"Pretentious bitch" Caitlyn murmured.

"What did you call me?" Jenny was glaring at her.

"Oh, sorry, not you, was miles away. OK, I'll go to this thing – for you – but with the caveat that if I hate it, I will be bailing early."

"Of course. But you won't. It'll be fun!"



They arranged to meet for a drink beforehand at the bar round the corner from the party. It had been a shitty week at work and she had managed to fall out with her sister (again), so Caitlyn was not in the highest of spirits.

"Let's have a cocktail to get us in the mood!" Jen suggested.

"Which one has the most alcohol in it? That's the one I want."

Two rounds later, she was more relaxed.

"So, tell me about this guy again?"

"His name is Evan. He was born here but his family is Australian. His mum and dad moved back about 10 years ago and he finally decided to follow them. He was in a relationship and now he is not, so it felt like the right time."

"And his friend, the tapas bar guy?"

"Dunno much about him, other than he is a trained chef and has had the place open for about a year. He plays football with Evan, that's how they know each other. I think he is called Greg."

And other than Steve and Alyssa, you don't know anyone else that is going, right?"

"Right. But free wine and tapas. What's not to like?"



As it turned out, there was plenty not to like. The flat was on the top floor and by the time they got to the front door, Caitlyn was breathing heavily and cursing herself for having a fourth cocktail. The door was open and the sound of the party was bleeding into the close. She distinctly heard the words 'Chablis', 'Marrakech' and 'glamping' as they climbed the final flight. She wasn't able to manage a sigh of disappointment so settled for shaking her head instead.

Some sort of world music was playing in the living room. A few couples were sitting around chatting. They glanced her way and then, realizing she was not someone they either knew or wanted to, they turned back to their conversations. 'The feeling is entirely mutual' she thought and moved on.

Jenny was standing in the doorway to the kitchen. Next to her was a tall, skinny man with a beard. "Cait, this is Evan."

Caitlyn extended her hand. "Hi, it's nice to meet you. Thanks for inviting us."

They chatted for a few minutes and she decided he was good guy. A good guy with a beard (a hard no for her), dubious taste in friends and music, but a good guy all the same.

"Would you like some tapas?" He asked them. "I believe they're nearly ready."

They followed him into the kitchen. There was a man standing at the cooker, swearing biblically at the open oven door.

"Just fucking heat up, will you?" he yelled and followed it up with a badly aimed kick. "Everything alright, Craig" Evan asked, smirking.

"No, everything is not fucking alright. Everything is a country mile from alright, since you ask. How did you ever cook anything on this thing?"

"I didn't, really. I hardly used it. Is it not working?"

"The oven is cold and the rings are barely on. I think it's shot. Might need a Plan B."

"Sorry bud, maybe I should have arranged a dry run or something."

"I should have checked. Never mind. Plan B. The restaurant is only a mile or so away. I can take the food back there and cook it then bring it back. Will need some help though."

Evan looked at Jenny who looked at Caitlyn, who shrugged. "OK, I'll do it." Craig looked at her and nodded. "Thanks. What's your name?"

"Caitlyn. Cait for short." She put her hand out and he looked at it, then grabbed a large pot and thrust it at her. "I'm Craig. Fill that up with the stuff from the oven." Then he paused and looked at her. "Sorry - thank you, I should have started with that. Bit stressed."

They filled up various pots, pans and other containers then carried everything downstairs. The front door to the close opened just before they got to it; Steve and Alyssa walked through.

“Hi guys!” Alyssa announced, smiling. “Where you off to? What’s with all the pots?”

Jenny filled her in on the details whilst they helped get the stuff out to Craig’s car. Caitlyn noticed Steve was very quiet and had a strange look on his face: a cross between anger and pain.

“Steve, are you ok?”

“Living the dream,” he said, his voice thick with sarcasm. “Catch you guys later.” He turned and walked back into the close without a second glance.

Alyssa rolled her eyes. “Don’t ask, he has been like this all day. I’m going to try a few cocktails to loosen him up. Evan, can you sort me out with something strong? I seem to remember you are a demon barman?”

“Sure thing. I’ll sort you out!”

Cait thought she caught a look and a smile between them.

Before she saw anything else, they all followed Steve’s footsteps and closed the door behind them.

Caitlyn and Craig walked to his car, the back seat full of haphazardly arranged cookware. “Have you met them before?”

She asked, nodding in the direction of the close.

“Erm, yeah – I’ve met her. Not him. Didn’t take to her and from what I saw of him just now, pretty much feel the same way. Sorry, they are your friends. Ignore me.”

“It’s ok, they’re not my friends. I know them through Jenny. And I don’t like them either. They totally fit in with the other people at the party, who I have never met but I’m pretty sure I also don’t like them.”

“Not a big fan of ethnic music, then?” he smiled. “Nope. I put it in the same category as jazz – not for me.”

“Same. The only exception I have is Spanish music. We play it at the restaurant and I have to admit it has grown on me. Otherwise, keep it.”

As they drove away, he looked back at where he parked. “Lost that space. Probably have to double park when we get back.”

“I have the same problem where I am. I’ve stopped taking the car out on a Sunday because I can’t find a space when I get back. Have to park it up next to the bins and move it first thing in the morning.”

They got to the restaurant and Craig went inside to get some help carrying the food inside. He came back a few minutes later shaking his head.

“Nightmare in there, one of the waiters is sick and they are struggling. They can’t help us carry the food in.”

“Sounds like we need ‘Plan C’? How about this? We can get the food in between us. I used to waitress in college – I could give them a hand while you get everything ready?”

“Really? You would do that? That would be great! Right, let’s go! Thank you.”

So Caitlyn spent the next 45 minutes taking orders, cleaning tables and delivering drinks to the customers, whilst trying desperately to remember any of her Standard Grade Spanish, to help with questions about the menu. Hardly the way she thought her Friday night would go, but in a strange way it was turning out better than she had expected.

Once the food was ready, they grabbed a few bottles of wine from the bar and loaded the car up again. As predicted, there were no spaces near the flat so Craig double parked and she texted Jenny for some help from upstairs.

No response.

They buzzed the entry phone and eventually the door unlocked. But no one came to help.

They went up and arrived at the front door, out of breath and loaded down with half the back seat. The door was slightly open and Craig pushed it with his foot so they could enter.

The living room was full but no one was talking. Steve stood in front of the crowd, in the middle of a speech. Alyssa was looking at him with tears in her eyes as he talked.

“...and she has been my inspiration, my life, for the last five years. I was thinking of asking her a question tonight. Bought a ring and everything. Until I found this on her phone.”

He stabbed a finger on the phone in his hand. Two muffled voices came from the Bluetooth speaker on the mantelpiece, grunting and gasping with increasing speed and intensity. Finally a man’s voice shouted “Ah, Alyssa!” and her voice squeaked in response. The man’s voice was not Steve’s.

Alyssa hunched over on the floor, her head in her hands. “So, when you asked me earlier what was wrong,” Steve shouted, “this is what’s wrong. Who is he, Lys? How long has it been going on?”

Alyssa did not reply, she just remained crouched, sobbing on the floor.

“It’s me, Steve,” said a voice from the kitchen door. Evan walked forward into the room. Steve stared at him.

“I’m sorry that you had to find out like this. We have been seeing each other for the last couple of months. It’s serious. We are in love. Alyssa is coming to Australia with me.”

“What?” Steve’s lower lip flopped and his voice trembled. “What???.....Australia??....What?...Lys is this true?”

“Stop calling me Lys!! I hate it!!” she spat at him. “I’ve always hated it. Yes, it’s true. I’m sorry. It’s over. I’m going with him.”

Evan walked over to her slumped body and bent down. “You ok?”

“Don’t you fucking touch her!” Steve screamed at him, lunging at Evan and catching his ear with a flailing fist.

Craig moved between them and grabbed Steve’s arms, pinning them to his sides. “Come on mate, calm down.”

Steve replied by headbutting him on the nose. There was an audible crack and blood poured down his face, blooming onto his white shirt. Craig fell to the ground holding his face.

The place erupted. Evan jumped on Steve and started punching him repeatedly. Others jumped in on both sides. Furniture broke. Glasses smashed. A girl screamed. The police were called and turned up quickly to break it up. An ambulance then arrived. Steve, Evan and a couple of others were arrested, and led away whilst a paramedic tended to Craig’s broken nose. After being patched up, he was taken to A&E. Caitlyn followed in his car, thankfully no longer feeling the effects of the earlier cocktails.



He was still in the waiting room when she walked in, carrying one of the pots. The place was packed with an assortment of Friday night casualties.

“Hi, how are you feeling? I brought you some food in case you were hungry.”

“Thanks, that’s very kind of you. I’m starving, actually. Nose is sore but I think I will live, just waiting for someone to see me to do what they have to do.” He glanced at the rest of the room.

“Might be a while though.”

They sat and munched on some gambas and champiñones. She had sneaked a bottle of Sangria disguised in a Fanta bottle, which they shared in between mouthfuls.

He told her about starting the business: how hard it was just to keep afloat, staffing problems and the rising cost of chorizo. But also about how much he loved it and how happy he was that he had done it.

“I know it’s a cliché but nothing beats seeing a restaurant full of happy faces eating my food.”

In return, she told him about her job and her flat, fighting with her sister and how much she had not been looking forward to the party. But also how good his food was and how much she enjoyed the brief waitressing stint she had done earlier.

“I haven’t done that in years, but it came back quickly. Everyone was really nice and the time flew by.”

“Trust me, that novelty wears off. Quickly.”

He paused, reached over and pushed the hair away from her eyes.

“I am really glad we got to meet, though. I wouldn’t have picked the waiting room at the Infirmary to get to know you but I’m happy that I did”

He was about to say something else but a nurse appeared and whisked him away.

When he came back half an hour later, she had dozed off in her chair. He nudged her awake.

“Hey you. Time to go. I’ll take you home.”



Six Months Later

The plane touched down early. They got their bags and navigated customs and passport control in under thirty minutes. He had been quiet on the flight, which she had put down to nerves and fatigue. The restaurant had been full on for the last month and they were both looking forward to some downtime.

“Shall we get a taxi?” She asked.

“No need – Uber is here.” He pointed to a black SUV at the end of the rank. “Oooh, fancy! I could get used to this!”

The car stopped on the outskirts of the city and they got out. She looked puzzled. “This isn’t the hotel. Where are we?”

“I wanted to show you something. See that restaurant over there?”

“Yes. You buying me lunch? Wait, it’s empty. Are they on siesta or something?”

“Not exactly. It’s not open right now. But it will be next month.

When we open it. You know you have been struggling with learning Spanish? Well how do you fancy learning it every day?”

“Are you kidding? Really?”

“Really. What do you think?”

“I think I am going to eat tapas for the rest of my life. Yes!! What will we call it?”

“I’ve been thinking about that. How about ‘Comida es Amor’?”

Her eyes squinted as she mouthed the words then translated them. Once she had, her face lit up. “Food is Love! Perfect!!”

They kissed and stood hand in hand, looking at their future in the warm afternoon sun.



Junctions

Huge choices and junctions are a part of everyone's life,
No matter if they are big or small,
Sometimes they block up your mind,
Like a massive concrete wall.

Yet sometimes these decisions are not so bad,
And there's not a need to worry,
Things we do day by day,
That we end up doing in a hurry.

The actions we take are the fork in a path,
They change who we are,
Where if we save all our money,
Or buy that fresh new car.

Our lives are ever changing,
Like walking down a cobbled street,
Shops open and close,
With so much new foods to eat.

Down these Great Junction streets,
New building plans will start,
But some buildings stay,
As if it's well kept art.

Soon people will ask,
"What did Leith used to be"
But it would have changed so much,
So don't ask me.

If I stepped outside,
I'd struggle to find my way,
Trying to find my favourite shop among others,
Like a needle in the hay,
Once someone asks where to go,
I'd have to find my feet,
Then I'd probably begin by recommending,
Great Junction Street.

Nile Collins Fraser

I like to People Watch

On Leith Walk I prefer to people watch.

I stand at the junction
I like to people watch.
Watching is fascinating;
You may catch expression
Through hair or clothes or song.
Yet I need a challenge.
I search in body language and eyes, I can see the minds of
everyone,
As though they're inside out
I may always be assuming but
sometimes, I'll be right

There's a woman checking her reflection
In a white clouded window.
She is going to a job interview; the first after her divorce
Her skirt and shirt indicate it so.

A wrinkled man in a pristine suit,
He sits stiff next to a wide eyed, messy-haired little girl with a
crumbling treat
That is his granddaughter he is babysitting.

A teenage girl at the bus stop; bulging bag in hand.
She flexes her fingers in restlessness.
She's leaving a house that doesn't feel warm.

A towering man on a guitar; singing vocals with heart
The crowd tossing coins a backing track

These people all have stories
Humans each of us are,
Different lives we've lived,
Unique choices each to make.
But we are all here now,
On Leith Walk
Where I like to people watch.

Lily Steele

Anything and Everything

Here you'll find
Anything and Everything
Luxury flats, Tired old Jock,
life in placcy bags, Hilsa fish, puri veg, All life
in
full Technicolour Up the Junction No pretention No pretending
just everything and anything.
Ripping engines impatient
in a veil of smog of Sketchy Beats Wide boy Window wide Bass
SLAMS
In Style
And Lookin' Trendy At Fashion Boutique: Clown wigs wi
hippy dresses,
neon shorts,
Skimpy tops
Here you'll find Anything and Everything: "Gucci",
"Marc Jacobs",
Pink satin diamante,
Ghetto trackies, Cowboy Joe Pistols at dawn.
STOP
A pint at Wilkies wi Tam deep draw on a fag... And here we go
The home stretch
Pork Chinese steaks an Luxury rhubarb pie Snapped up fur
Friday's payday tea by
a bleach blond beauty. Passes by
Beard and beanie Local IPA
In a sustainable
net bag.
Her and him and them And us

Pickin up nothin,
An
Anything
And everything.
Abstract ideas at
Concept Clothing
Tartan caps
Now Half Price,
SALE
Black work socks,
Full
Track Suit
Reduced
"JUICE"
Special offer
Big size
Jeans
Velcro shoes,
Anything and Everything NOW IN STOCK
This is pure
NEW YORK COTURE
Spewed out at
The Newkirkgate Crew 13.10
Settled in fur the day Costa and a Carling Taps aff
Lounging out-
The Marbella o the North
This is anything and everything goes
Great Junction Style.

Beth Primrose

The Junction

Above a street of culture,
in a dingy one-bedroom flat,
a man hunched like a vulture,
thinking a choice from where he sat.

But he wasn't there.
He was at a junction of life.
His clothes stank from wear,
And his headache cut like a knife.

Two roads before him,
one a path of wrong by right.
A destination grim.
As nothing was there but night.

The other a hard uphill.
A place right by left.
A way by the hardest will.
A road of hard theft.

The theft of the worst sorrow.
The theft of fake calm.
Was this the way to follow?
The choice in his palm.

At the top of the left road,
lay an oasis of green trees.
A place of nature's true load.
Bushes filled with roses and bees.

The route was a way so hard,
but the destination was not.
Was he courage or coward?
So, the left was where the man sought.

And so, he had made his choice.
But his legs did not move.
A road leading to rejoice.
A pathway made to prove.

He could get lost anywhere.
For it was not that way or that.
But for the time then and there,
he made the choice from where he sat.

And so, he went the right way.
Leaving the easy road of downhill.
And up where the uphill lay.
A brave man's choice made from his free will.

And so, he let the bottle go.
So, glass met the sink.
A smashing sound far from one low.
A loud, harsh, sharp twink.

One last look at freedom through theft.
For this was what had truly mattered.
And then, he grimaced, turned, and left.
From where the bottle lay shattered.

Matthew Clater-Loeb

The Creature under the Bridge

“Will it nae move son?”

“Fuckin’ thing has never worked right. Billy, can ye just push doon on that wee lever by tha left wheel? Aye. Wait, no that wan, Aye that wan.”

The mobility scooter, now in neutral, began to slowly drift forwards down the slopey west side of Leith Walk. Billy grabbed it and started pushing Alec along the street.

Billy, skinny, lanky and once-upon-a-time quite the ‘braw fella’, now just looked charmingly be-grizzled, and then Alec, shorter, stockier, with a full head of thick grey hair and his neatly trimmed moustache, he was still almost six feet tall when not sat in a motorised wheelchair. Both in their sixties they’d been pals for well over forty years, steadfast uncomplicated support through thick, thin, divorce, cancer, loss, disability. Not to mention the football triumph, rugby defeat and the rest.

It had been leased from the place on Henderson Street and whilst useful, given Alec was waiting on a double hip replacement, had also proved to be a massive headache. The tyre blowing, the battery constantly failing and even almost drowning him down by the Shore when the brake came away in his hand. Only the quick wits of a young Ukrainian sailor on leave in the port stopped him going straight over the quayside to join the rusty shopping trolleys and used silty condoms at the bottom of the harbour.

And then today. They’d met up at Robbie’s to watch the footy, another dismal derby drowned in doubles and pints. Six-nil against. Pure shite. Then the battery out halfway home.

“Did ye hear about Gary McEnilly?”

Billy hadn’t so Alec clued him in, he’d been found unconscious in Coalie Park last week.

“Ah had only seen him aboot two days before. He wis talkin’ his usual history chat, ah mean ah dinnae normally listen tae him, except he wis saying something about tha bridge.”

“Which bridge? Tha wan at Sandport? Or tha swing bridge?”

“Naw, Junction Street. Pure nonsense tho, something about seein’ some sort o creature doon there wan night.”

“Oh ye mean tha creature under tha bridge?”

“Wait tha now Billy, y’ken aboot aw this?”

“If yer referring tae tha strange goings on doon there then ah’ve heard plenty. An ah certainly wouldnae be messing aboot doon there at night. Nae wonder Gary got hisself a daeing.”

They weren’t all that far from Junction Bridge itself now, having already pushed past the endless roadworks at Henderson Street.

“Like whit for instance?”

Billy suggested they continue their conversation inside

Gladstones over a pint as it was only just the back of ten, “And it’s always quiet there on Tuesdays.”

Entering the pub it was dead but not quiet. Five large TV screens that had likely been showing the football earlier now blared ‘Toy Boy’ by Sinitta.

“Fucks sake Suzey, turn that shite aff tha telly would ye”. The landlady obliged as they were the only customers in the large deserted bar. Suzey was a naturally friendly woman in her late fifties, thin and dressed smartly. She and her late husband had owned the place well over a decade. She looked weary though, clearly running the place on her own had taken its toll.

“Two pints o heavy love, ta.”

Whilst Billy was over at the bar Alec carefully climbed out of the scooter making his way past the pool tables, down the steps and into the central seating area.

Billy brought the beers over and sat opposite, placing two mats down followed by the amber coloured pints. “Aye there’s always been strange goings on about that bridge”

“Gary said it wis originally a crossing over tha water before they built Great Junction Street, a way tae link up tha new docks wi Leith Walk. And then tha bridge wis expanded tae allow trains tae pass underneath but there wis a terrible accident, four o tha workers wis crushed by a stone column, it knocked them aw intae tha water, holding their twisted broken bodies doon beneath tha surface.”

“So they drowned?”

Alec nodded taking a gulp of his ale, shivering slightly at the thought of the terrible tragedy.

“Dae ye ken about tha wee door in tha side o’ tha bridge?”

Alec shook his head.

“It’s up in tha shadows on tha north side, cast into the bridge wall where it meets Coburg Street. It’s auld, real auld. It maist’ve been part o tha expansion works when they poor workies wis killed. But nae wan kens whit’s inside, there’s no even a door handle or keyhole. Whit d’ye think o that?”

“Aye, strange, Gary didnae mention tha door, jest tha creature.” This bridge talk unsettled Alec, he tried to recall Gary’s words. What had he said? Something in Leith, old and alive. A spirit? A creature? Then he’d been discovered in Coalie Park near the same bridge, just days after speaking to him.

Beep beep.

The text notification sound on his phone. Another friend, Jimmy. Still posting his usual shite about immigrants and links to GB news. What a bell-end he’d turned into. What was it about single men, the internet and getting drawn into conspiracy nonsense. And Jimmy was a former union man like him and Billy. This wasn’t what Leith was all about, wasn’t what they’d gone on strike for all those years ago.

“Wan mair for tha road?” Alec offered and Billy nodded. It was

the back of eleven now and plenty of time for another. The landlady clocked their agreement and started to pour.

A minute or two later she brought both pints over, took payment on the card machine and left with the empties.

“Ah wis gaun tae tell ye aboot tha creature tho,” Billy looked left, then right and lowered his voice a tad, although there was no one else in Gladstones other than themselves and Suzey.

“It’s always wee whispers o stories here an there, but folk have heard noises at night under there. Sometimes comin’ fae behind tha wee rusty door wi nae handle.”

Alec involuntarily gripped his pint glass tighter as Billy spoke.

“Wan night this fella by tha name o Robertson heard screamin’ an bangin’ doon there an ran up tae Gladstones tae get help. A few o tha boys followed him back doon but there wisnae a sound tae be heard. Then that same fella disappeared a few months later. Tho mebbe it wasnae related.”

“Hows dae ye ken aw that?”

“Cos ah wis wan o tha boys who followed him doon unner tha bridge that night that’s hows. Ah didnae hear any bangin’ or screamin’ but it wis wit ah didnae hear that spooked me. Nae birds, animals, just dead silence. Even tha water passing by didnae make a sound. Robertson wis white as a sheet, there wis nae way he’d made it up.”

“Ach Billy, ye’ll be giving me nightmares, ye ken ah dinnae live

tae far away fae tha bridge. Tho whit yer saying matches wi tha rest o Gary’s story.”

“Oh aye?”

“Efter tha accident two younger brothers o wan o tha workies that died were taken on by tha railway by way of compensation tae his family. Tha dead fella wis called Adam Fury, an his two siblings wis Francis and Cathal, only 18 an 15 years auld, but for they days that wis normal tae be oot working full-time.”

“There wis still six months or mair work tae be completed an at first aw wis fine. Tha other workies got on well wi tha boys, they did their twelve hours a day, six days a week an stayed at a bunkhouse in tha engine yards doon tha way.”

“However efter another accident a new gang boss had tae be brought in cos tha heidman was crippled. This new fella Arthur Tattershall wis an awfy man, cruel and vindictive, pushing tha entire crew harder an harder. Hing is, it wis rumoured that tha boss promised Tattershall a nice wee bonus if tha bridge wis completed ahead o schedule.”

“Plus, even tho he kenned aboot Adam Fury dying a horrible death, he seemed tae take extra pleasure in bullying tha brothers, wee Cathal in particular.”

“This went on for weeks until wan cold November night aboot an hour before finish time, wee Cathal - who wis nae weakling but hadnae eaten a thing for hours - fumbled a rope causing a stone block tae fall an crack in hauf. It wis nae big deal, nae wan wis injured an there wis plenty mair stone blocks but Tattershall

flew aff tha handle. Shoutin' an screamin' he grabbed Cathal by tha neck an choked him before picking him up an throwing him intae tha river. Tha laddie went beneath tha surface but didnae emerge so his brother dove in an pulled him out fae that filthy freezing water."

"An aw Tattershall could say wis "Back tae work!" but nae wan would. Instead they downed tools tae help Francis lift Cathal over tae tha wee hospital on Maritime Street. Tattershall wis just left fuming on his own underneath tha bridge."

"O tha boy wis awfy sick efter that, an there probably would've been charges against Tattershall except for tha oddest thing. He wis never seen again. Immediately there wis rumours that Adam Fury's spirit wis taking revenge on him, but other's thought Tattershall may have just scarpered 'cos he thought he might get tha jail."

"Stranger still when tha workers returned later that night tae tha bunkhouse they checked his room an he hadnae been back. It wis completely untouched, including aw tha money an baccy he'd stashed under tha back o tha mattress, an it stayed that way until a new boss got tha room an aw they possessions wis bagged up. Some o tha workers later said they could sometimes still hear him doon by tha bridge late at night shouting "Get tae work!" further proving he'd been done in by Adam Fury's ghost"

"Very strange. And wis Cathal saved?"

"Aye, tho he wis never able tae go back tae work on tha bridge. Francis quit an aw."
Billy felt a coldness cut sharply through his upper body. It wasn't

drafty here but the thought of this ghost, this creature, so nearby. Two hundred feet from where they sat.

Feeling a gaze on his back he turned. It was the landlady listening in, probably out of boredom initially but then engrossed in Alec's second-hand story.

"Suze, did ye ever see any strangeness wi tha spirits like?"

Snapping out of her reverie she replied cattily, "When tha regulars doon here get overly acquainted wi the spirits there's a'ways some odd goings on. Remember auld Iain shiting his pants at tha bar on his birthday last month? Or Tommy Tits getting angry wi tha folk that look at him, an tha folk that dinnae? Or Debbie Tesco's belly dancing? Need ah go on?"

Billy and Alec laughed, relieving the tension.

"Oh aye, Tia Maria and Jack Daniels, theys tha spirits that gets tha locals frisky on a weekend eh Suzey?"

The old landlady smiled back but there was a flinty look in her eyes. "Dinnae be spreading this story aboot lads but ah ken aw aboot tha noises doon there under tha bridge. But there's wan story ye dinnae ken, fae years ago when ah wis workin' for auld Bob who had tha bar before me."

"Now we aw ken tha folk who come tae Leith an talk aboot changin' it, knocking doon this an that, sayin' they'd force tha jakeys oot, tryin' tae gentrify tha place even faster than it's already happenin'. Well there wis this fella, he wis Scottish but fae tha west, Saltcoats o somewhere. An he wis a right fanny,

talkin' tha big talk but tha hing wis he had tha cash tae back it up."

"What wis his name?" Alec was curious, something rang a bell about this.

"Ah cannae recall, an even if ah could ah dinnae want tae be thinkin' aboot him, not efter whit happened. Now at tha time it seemed like he wis never oot a tha bar, ah think he'd rented a posh flat round tha corner fae tha old Provi store. He wis always shootin' his mooth aff aboot whit wis guid for Leith, but never any thought tae whit wis guid for Leithers."

Alec's brain suddenly fired up, "Ah ken him now, he wanted tae build a shopping centre an flats doon on tha old poorhouse in Seafield, that project got quite far along no?"

"Aye, he'd been bribing aw tha right folk, had bought tha land and planning permission tae. Luxury flats, a retail centre, an aw wi tha council paying for new access roads as well as promising tae move tha sewage works, remember?" Alec nodded.

"And he wis in here bragging aboot it an buyin' folks drinks tha very night before construction wis startin'. Ah served him masself, he wis payin' wi wan o' they gold credit cards, "the drinks are on me" he said. Tho ah thought they drinks were mair likely on tha investors."

"Anyways he's gi-ing it Billy Big-Baws. Nae offence Billy."

"None taken Suze."

"Saying "Leith's gaun tae change for tha better, jobs for tha boys, but no for tha catholics, ha-ha". Well that didnae go doon tae well did it, ah mean, there's both kinds drink in here, but never any bother between tha Hibs an Hearts lads y'ken? So it started tae get awfy ugly wi people squaring up tae this fella an throwing drinks over him. Auld Bob telt him tae get hisself awa', so awa' he went lookin' aw hurt. Two fellas went wi him for tha free bevvie an they headed aff tae tha Vine Bar, only tha way ah heard it tha big man stopped for a pish doon tha side o tha bridge whilst tha others walked on ahead tae order tha round."

"Only he never caught them up, an they wis pure fuming tae be payin' fo' tha three pints between tha two o them – but pay they did, reluctantly, an drank tha beers before wandering back thirty minutes later tae look for their round-buying pal. Coming doon past tha corner o' Coburg Street there wis nae sight o him an shoutin' his name got nae response. Clambering over tha wall they headed doon tha embankment, aboot haufway doon tha ground wis damp wi urine an cos it wis pitch black wan o the fellas slipped right over in it."

"Aw o a sudden they heard a noise, like somewan screamin' in pain. They both looked tae see where it'd come fae but there wis nae clue until wan o them climbed up under tha bridge by tha rusty door. When he got there it wis wide open an inside wis tha big fella's clothes. Socks, pants, trows, tha lot but nae manny inside them. Efter searchin' for a while mair they gave up an came back tae here tae call tha polis."

"Wis he found?"

"Aye, next again morning, but naewhere near tha bridge, he wis

over a mile awa' on his construction site at Seafield. Just lying on a wee mound o earth wi'oot a stitch o clothing on his body and a look of pure terror on his face, like he'd been scared tae death."

Alec felt queasy, there were too many odd things for it to all be coincidence, "How did he die?"

"It wis never explained, besides tha fearful expression on his pus there wisnae a mark on his body. Nae clues. Nothing."

"So tha shopping centre an tha flats? That's tha bit wi' Halfords now right?"

"Aye, wi'oot that fella tha whole hing couldnae happen, so tha council just buried it 'til some other bastard bought tha site. Some folk said it wis tha creature, an now mebbe ah'm thinkin' it wis, tha ghost o Adam Fury took him awa' cos of whit he wis daeing. Fury's ghost an tha creature are wan an tha same."

"But he wis just daeing whit a hundred other numpties have done since and they've nae been killed."

"Mebbe aye, but mebbe no. Did they others go against tha spirit o Leith? And then go doon under tha bridge at midnight? Like whit wis Gary up tae doon there when he got hurt?"

Beep beep. Alec quickly checked his phone. It was Jimmy again. The knob-jockey said he was coming to Gladstones from the Prom Bar and already on his way along the old railway path alongside the water to meet them.

"What's tha time Billy?"

"Aboot five minutes tae twelve, why?"

"It's jest Jimmy's on his way for a pint – Ah didnae even tell him where we wis."

"Oh aye? Guid for him but we should go after these pal," Billy shook the two inches of brown liquid at the bottom of his glass towards Alec.

Beep beep.

Another text from Jimmy "Get 'em in pal."

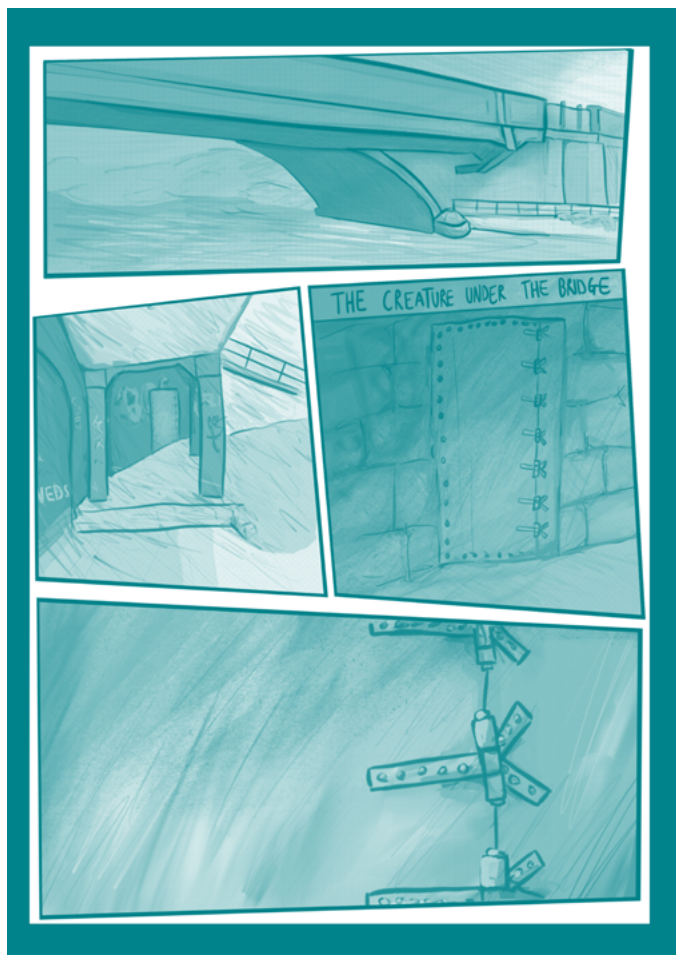
Alec sighed and signalled to Suze, "We'll have wan mair each," Billy shrugged but didn't stop him, "And wan for Jimmy, Tennents, an somethin' for yerself Suze."

"He better nae bring his conspiracy chat aboot them chemtrails in tha sky when he gets here," Suzey remembered the heated arguments last time, "Aye, yer pal Jimmy has tha look o somewan that masturbates an awfy lot but doesnae enjoy it."

Three minutes later, after their laughter had died down, Suze put the three pints down and took Alec's card for payment again. There was a loud click as the clock above the bar hit twelve midnight.

At that moment a loud bloodcurdling scream came from somewhere outside. Across by Junction Bridge. They heard it again, louder this time. Suzey went for her phone and dialed 999.

Later on they shared out Jimmy's unclaimed pint, half each between them whilst giving quick statements to the polis. He wouldn't be needing it now.



Text: Pat McGarvey
Artwork: Elsie Belle McGarvey

The Links

Leith Links, a park for the land,
A park with a spark.
Family and chums
Mums and their weans
Teens gazing at the greens
A drunk man pees on the side of a tree
Bees fly though the breeze
Out of Leith Links kids in tracksuits walk down
Great junction street.
They have pals up Lochend too

A decision has to be made
Time is about to fade
Their mates down the links feeling betrayed
The choice has been made.

Hamish Ridgwell

Spiritual Crossroads

Reaching beyond the harbour –
Did you rise again?

Claiming your ancestral side,
Further back
And further still.

Fighting repressive blankets,
Sewn in times of forget.

Times of small thoughts
That rampage through
Tiny stitches.

Rays light up the links.

Remembering intuition,
No longer grasping at lost footprints.

Rising with the waves,
With birds flying home
To roost.

To batten down the hatches
As the storm rides in,
But the storm rides out.

The roads hold on.

Their cross stitch pattern
And hatching light
Strikes a chord.

Remembers and wanes.

And births
With collective creativity.

With chalked lines
Of hopeful colours
Flowing across the junction.

And on – linking us to other views.

Alex Beata Clarke

The Quiet in Between

There are mornings
where the wind arrives ahead of the sun
a blunt messenger
tapping on the shoulder of thought.

The dock cranes stand still
unmoved by the weight of waiting.
I pass them as ghosts pass mirrors
uncertain if I should be seen.

Somewhere between the water
and the tireless murmur of dockside bars
I pause -
a memory stops beside me like a tram,
its doors opening to nowhere.

Grief doesn't shout here
it lingers
like salt on stone
or the gull's echo circling invisible questions.

I once loved someone
who said silence was an honest map,
they left without folding it.

Now the streets rearrange themselves
depending on which feeling I carry.
Cobblestones rise like small residences,
shopfront reflections remind me
that faces can be homes or thresholds.

At the corner where Henderson Street
dips into a Great Junction,
I watch a child toss a pebble into the water,
time collapses into the ripples.

A junction after all
is never just a choice.
It is the stillness before turning
the ache of remaining
and the quiet in between.

Sophie Arthur

Follow your Feet

Some junctions in life you can't stop from happening, others you get a choice. This is one of the junctions that I had a choice of, and it changed my life for the better. It all started when a coach from a local Gaelic football club came to our school for a taster session. I had never heard of Gaelic football before, but it was a really fun session and I wanted to join the club. When I found out that some of my friends also wanted to join, it gave me the confidence to try it out.

We all enjoyed our first night and after a few training sessions, three or four people decided to quit. Of course, when your friends leave something it can be hard not to follow them, but three of us decide to stay. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Now we are going to two training sessions a week. After about a year, we fell in love with it and soon went to it three times a week. It was getting serious now - we were not the new ones anymore, and we went to more and more tournaments. We had to choose now to stick with it or quit and start something new.

The decision was clear.

This was something we really enjoyed and have to stick with it. Four years later, we are still playing and getting pretty good. We even got asked to play for Scotland. Unfortunately, at the tournament before going off to Ireland to play against the best teams in Britain, I broke my foot. It got repeatedly studded in the same place. I had never felt pain like that before. I was rushed off to the medical tent, I couldn't even walk. Everyone was so worried the match stopped. It was the final. The medical person said I should go to the hospital and get it checked.

When we arrived, driven by my friend's mum, the wait to be seen was four hours. I couldn't stop crying, not from the pain but from how scared I was of what happened and what could happen. My mum did everything to keep me calm. Fortunately, because I was a child, I was taken quickly to see what they needed to do. I got a wheelchair and needed an x-ray. The thought that I might have broken my foot scared me half to death. After my x-ray I had to get another because my ankle didn't look right. It turned out my ankle was fine, but I did fracture my fifth metatarsal in three places and broke one of my toes.

I was off sport for months. This made me feel so useless, and I didn't know if I would ever go back. My first training session back felt amazing. I was glad my mum convinced me to go back. Over a year later I'm back playing for Scotland. I'm going to Ireland next weekend. I couldn't be more excited. But if I hadn't had everyone around me telling me it would all be fine, I probably wouldn't have even started playing the sport that I have fallen in love with. All these junctions changed my life for the better and I couldn't be happier with how it all happened. Even though there were ups and downs, I loved every minute of it.

Kaelin Littlejohn-Kidd

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Sincere thanks are due to:

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Many anonymous donors

Dawn Birkinshaw, Alistair Rutherford, Aly Barr,
Elspeth Alexandra, Ruth Campbell, Ed Carter,
Bethany Thompson – for all their work behind the scenes.

Fifth Edition

Published in Edinburgh, 2025

Cover illustration: Norman Oyoo
(in collaboration with Out of the Blueprint)

Design and layout: Out of the Blueprint

Sustainably printed by Out of the Blueprint using rice ink
on 100% recycled paper.

Leith Writing is a charity, OSCR registration no 053463

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A Message from the Makar

Edinburgh is now 900-years-old, still a stunner of a city, as much earthy ancient as new-wave wish-giver. It takes a class act to harness their community's stories in order to light both a beacon for the future and a flare for the past – to galvanise its denizens through sentiment and lore. And how truly vital to do so, in spite of it all. None do it with such savvy, such gallusness and joy, as Leith and its Leithers. This parcel of words, this gooey word crumble, stands testament to that; steely, soppy, and salient as the dreamers who dreamt it.

Michael Pedersen, Edinburgh Makar

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