



**THE SEAGULL
AT THE SHORE**





Seagull

A loose generalisation for birds in the very large *Larus* group; widespread in north-west Europe; noted for their adaptability to sea and land habitats; intelligent, social, noisy; omnivorous, opportunistic scavengers.



Shore

A stretch of riverbank shored up to give ships a secure berth.



Leith Shore

The third street in the world to be lit by electric light, after streets in New York and London.

The Seagull at the Shore:

An Anthology of Leith Writings

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 4 | Introduction by Adam Barclay | 43 | The Other Leith Links by Anoushka Ross |
| 10 | A snippet o Leith Walk shops fae the tap deck on a no 22 bus
by Carole Marr | 44 | Lady of the Links by Richard Demoily |
| 12 | The Birthplace of Golf by M M Lewis | 52 | Rite of Passage in the Port O' Leith Bar by Rex Sweeny |
| 15 | Easter Road by Jules Horne | 53 | Water O' Leith by Eva Whitten |
| 16 | Every Guarding Elm by J. Pennington-Twist | 54 | The Last Links by David Donovan |
| 18 | Leith – a short story by Arlo Rogers | 58 | The Under-Leith by Eric Scarboro |
| 19 | Glint of Silver in the Sun by Theo Christodoulidis | 60 | Uplifting by Jim Aitken |
| 24 | La Lluvia de Leith / Honeymoon in Leith by David Bleiman | 63 | When the Pilrig Church Clock Strikes 13 by Mike Cowley |
| 26 | The Hideout by Tom Duncan | 65 | My Visit to Leith by Eilidh Lehenny |
| 27 | Leith links by Nina-Rosa Gunson-Milne | 66 | On visiting the Antony Gormley sculptures by Beag Horn |
| 28 | Leith you lead me by Alex Beata Clarke | 67 | The Seagull at the Shore by Einar Mayor |
| 30 | The idiot son by Jim Laing | 70 | Acknowledgements |
| 31 | Pass It On by Elspeth Alexandra | | |
| 41 | Lost at Sea by Anoushka Ross | | |
| 42 | Leith Links by Ava Hutchinson | | |

Introduction

Leith to me has always been a pile of contradictions. Arguably one of the most famous neighbourhoods in the UK, many people the world over will either have been introduced to Leith by The Proclaimers: upbeat, joyful, sunny, or by Trainspotting: grim, dangerous, a cultural dead end. Often overlooked and stereotyped by Edinburgh at large (“Why would you move down to Leith, it’s a bit stabby down there isn’t it?” – Man on No.11 Bus, Jan 2022), at the time of writing Leith is ranked as Time Out magazine’s 4th coolest neighbourhood to live in. That’s not just Scotland or the UK by the way, that list is for the entire world.

On a more granular level, Great Junction Street is singled out as one of the most acutely deprived areas in the city. If one looks at the SIMD (the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) map these differences are highlighted starkly on a sliding scale from hot red to cool blue, top percentile most deprived to top percentile least deprived. The map flips from red to blue almost street-to-street. Nowhere else in the city looks like this.

Despite a history fraught with scarring, sieges, betrayal, compromise and, eventually absorption, Leith is still here. Leith has kept its identity here in a way that many parts of the city have not. Leith is still here and it’s the 4th coolest neighbourhood in the world.

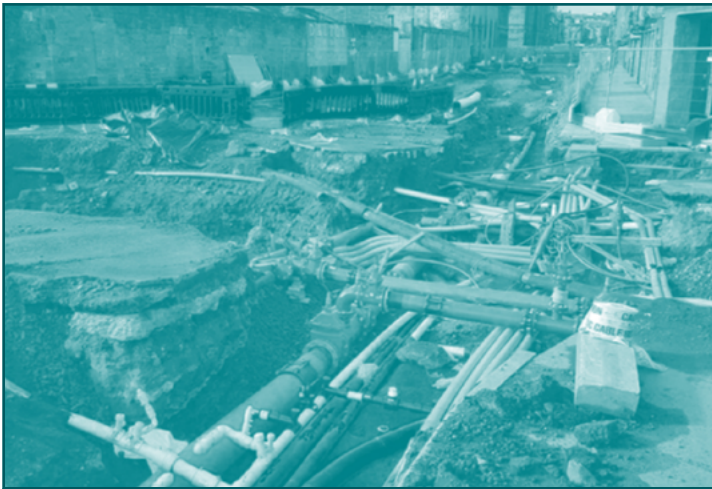
In the introduction to the previous collection of Leith Writings ‘*The Darting Salamander*’, Tim Bell spoke expertly to this history. The story of Leith from the early 19th century, charting the political decisions and social upheavals that have rocked Leith across the centuries. With this context, and the theme of this collection ‘Leith links...’, in mind, I would like to take these pages to talk about where we as a community find ourselves in the here and now.

It’s July 2022, to date the hottest summer since records began, estimates are placing the average energy bill at £4,000pa for 2023 and Leith is in the fifth year of the second round of the Famous Edinburgh Tramworks. A targeted survey conducted in March 2018 put satisfaction with the current transport provision at 91%, but the money had already been allotted and the contracts awarded so it happened anyway. An investigation into the reasons why the cost of the first round of works ballooning to over £1 billion (!) was launched. The cost of the investigation itself has now exceeded the cost of the Chilcot Report into the Iraq War.

The first noticeable thing to change was the disappearance of certain prominent landmarks. The Robert Burns statue, the Elm Row clock, the Kinloch pigeons, the wonky-but-fun framed mural thing on the Constitution Street wall of the South Leith Parish Churchyard. Then they made the longest road in the city into a one-way street.

It is hard to describe to those who haven’t seen it just how disruptive to everyday life the excavation of Leith Walk is. There’s a certain weary wryness that we’ve all adopted to make it through. It sounds comical, trying to describe to friends the endlessly relocating crossing points, the removal of every single litter bin from the entire street, watching 20 workies all supervise the apprentice dig a small hole, the mysterious noodles sprouting from the ground like an alien fungus, taking a left turn onto Dalmeny Street and it’s CLOSED AGAIN THEY’VE DUG IT UP FOUR TIMES ALREADY. But the effect that it’s had on those in our community with mobility issues, the elderly already struggling with isolation and loneliness, individuals with auditory hypersensitivity and so many more, has been utterly devastating.

I, like many others, was working from home during the pandemic. From my old flat, perched atop the big green vape shop in Middlefield, I had front-row seats to the worst of the ground-breaking works for over a year. Walls shaking, floors vibrating, concrete saws and pneumatic drills for up to 8 hours a day like some novel kind of construction-based interrogation



the excavation of Leith Walk

technique. This is an experience that will have been shared by thousands.

I don't think it's overdramatic to predict that the tramworks will leave us with all with a kind of shared trauma once they are done. The social effects of the pandemic isolation have been exacerbated by the din, the dust, the discomfort, the disarray. These things will stay with us long after we're used to trams ding-dinging their way up and down Leith Walk.

In addition, the environmental quality has been gradually eroded over the course of the works too. In March 2022 the tramworkers cut down the 70-year-old trees outside the Leith Central building. This shows both a fundamental misunderstanding, or a lack of care, about the theories of modern, enriching urban design. Leith Walk was designed as a European-style arboreal boulevard after all, but I'm sure the council doesn't care. UNESCO who?

However, and kudos to making it through that assault of doom and gloom, I do believe that there is a silver lining to all of this chaos.

I think it's only natural, when something is taken from you, to start to value it more. I was born in Leith in the early 90s. Since then, Leith has done what it's always done, rolled with the punches, and changed, PERSEVERED, onwards and upwards etc. It's a shame that once again the people of Leith have been asked to bear the brunt of the consequences for the council's ambition. However, since the end of the lockdown I can honestly say I have never seen the community more engaged, more connected, more up to get stuck in, more full of the spirit of Leith.

Since opening the bookshop we've had so many encouraging, enlightening chats with people engaged in all sorts of endeavours all across the neighbourhood. Art space, photography projects, boozy poetry, tarot card illustrators, historical boat repair, terrarium making. It's all happening and it's all happening here.

Leith Links, once dark and full of white dog poo, has never felt more like a real space for the community. Allotments, the Croft, proposals



that oddly shaped hill

for skateparks, adventure playgrounds, kendo classes, agriculture workshops, and tai chi at 6am. Did you know Leith Links was once used as a plague hospital? Leith Links is also intrinsically tied to the history of golf, the oldest surviving written set of golfing rules were penned by the 'Gentlemen Golfers of Leith' in 1744. You know that oddly shaped hill? An important defensive structure during the siege of Leith. No matter what, our history will always show through and this will always be a space for the people.

If the isolation took us from each other, then having a big moan about the trams has brought us together.

So, at the end of it all, what is there to be said for our new transport links, our new Leith Links and our new social links? The trams will bring change to Leith, not all of it positive to be sure, but it will change. The Links will soon be the nicest green space in the city, I give it two years before many of the Meadows based activities find their way down here.

I like to think that whenever change comes to Leith, it always ends up being on our own terms. I've heard the concern that the trams represent the final step in the incorporation of Leith, making it just another part of a city now defined by a callous lack of care for its own heritage. But maybe, just maybe, instead of making Leith a little more Edinburgh, we'll make Edinburgh a little more Leith.

That's the thing about the trams, they'll go up the Walk too.

Adam Barclay

Manager,
Argonaut Books

A snippet o Leith Walk shops fae the tap deck on a no 22 bus

Cashing gaming

Tak a chance, loser

Braiding world

Ma heid hurts

Your Move

Not a chance, I'm fine whaur I am

Serreno Manchego Tapa's

Fancy a nibble hen

Vacuum exchange

Get awa wi yer sookin an blawin

Vet

Ye care aboot that dug mair than me

Bookies

Only a fool, but then ye might get lucky

Blinds

Sneak a peek peepin Tam

Tailend fish

I'm goin tae batter you, whaur's the broon sauce

The Cutting Room

Shampoo and set, feels braw

Army store

Ready for onythin, Rambo

Harburn hobbies

Last train to Leith Central

Private shop

Ye dirty auld bastard

Carol Marr

The Birthplace of Golf

“This is where the whole sorry business started,” Simcock said, shaking his head for emphasis.

“Too true,” agreed Frobisher. “Worst crime you can commit against a good walk.”

Robert Simcock, President of the Global Radical Croquet Front and his deputy, Jim Frobisher walked side by side in Leith Links, merrily swinging their croquet mallets. They swaggered up to the bronze statue of Dr John Rattray, first Captain of the Leith Golfers. Rattray’s pose was poised, in the perfect position holding his club ready for a powerful swing. The air was cool, a gentle breeze carrying the sound of traffic and children playing.

They walked on to the plaques accompanying the statue. Simcock read aloud, in a tone of complete disgust: “Leith is the birthplace of competitive golf, first home of the Gentleman Golfers who wrote the original rules and witness to John Rattray’s inaugural Silver Club victory... Well,” he sneered, “we’ll see about that.” Simcock grinned and brought out a small device from his tweed jacket’s pocket, a flat plastic square lined with buttons and a small display, with numbers, which displayed the current year, 2125. He held the power to change the world in his hand and the will to use it. “No more golf,” he said, turning to Frobisher.

“No more golf,” Frobisher said. “Long live croquet!” Simcock and Frobisher knocked the heads of their croquet mallets together in something like a toast, without the drink.

Simcock typed in the digits for the date they wanted to travel to, 11091744. The world shimmered around them. Their stomachs leapt like they were on a rollercoaster and their heads clouded over. When their minds cleared

they were in a very different Leith Links. The roads were transformed to more basic tracks, the cars parked on the streets were gone. Best of all, thought Simcock, the golfing statue and plaques were gone. If he had his way they would never exist.

“Right, Frobisher. We’re going to find those misguided fools who call themselves the Gentlemen Golfers of Leith and we’re going to teach them the error of their ways. Explain the blight that Golf has brought to the future and how much better the world would be if today they formalised the gentlemanly rules of croquet. Croquet will replace golf and the world will never be the same!”

“About jolly good time too,” Frobisher said. The two men strode towards the assembled crowd of gentlemen golfers, but halted as a third man, crackling with static and brandishing a golf club stood in their way. He wore a driving cap with a visor, a cashmere sweater decorated with diamonds, cargo shorts and socks and golfing shoes. He was ready for action. He pointed the iron golf club at Simcock and Frobisher.

“I know your game,” the gentleman in immaculate golfing attire said. “It’s the wrong game. I’m here to stop you. I’m here to save golf! Godfrey McLaren, Chair of the Campaign to Restore Golf.

“We haven’t changed anything yet,” Simcock protested, raising his croquet mallet.

“You already did,” said McLaren. “Croquet, formalised in 1744 in Leith Links by the Gentleman Croquet Players of Leith dominates the sporting world of the future. In my time there are millions of players worldwide, the International Croquet Open, televised croquet tournaments non-stop, multi-million endorsements. Croquet fashion. Croquet megastar sex scandals. Golfing is a minor game, played in abandoned fields and weed-filled car parks. I’m bringing golf back.”

“That sir,” said Simcock “is fighting talk.”

Battle was joined. The men fought valiantly, their very ways of life at stake. McLaren wielded his Iron like it was the hammer of Thor itself. The croquet men fought valiantly with their mallets but they were no match for the sheer force and brutality of the Nine Iron and McLaren's extended swing. At last, McLaren stood over Simcock's defeated body, still grasping his splintered and broken croquet mallet.

"Just accept it," McLaren said. "Croquet will never replace golf. Nothing will ever replace the gentlemanly sport of golf."

Simcock, red-eyed, looked away. It was over.

In the future, without even knowing why, millions of golfers simultaneously breathed a sigh of relief and clutched their irons even more tightly.

Simcock and Frobisher, returned to their normal time stood in front of the statue of John Rattray again. Simcock was certain that the statue's smile was wider than ever.

M M Lewis

Easter Road

When I am at Easter Road I see fans cheering, shouting, booing. I hear people shouting at the ref. I also smell the pies and the hot dogs, which smell amazing. I taste an amazing steak pie at half-time. and I feel my hands clutching to the seat to win at the last minute from a penalty. And then at the end of the game everyone is belting out Sunshine on Leith.

Jules Horne, age 12

Every Guarding Elm

I've smelt the tang of burning heather,
As the pest came creeping through.
Bishop Couper,
Holy visions in his eyes,
Knockin' divots out of my lush green flesh.

I've seen the brightly painted yachts
Cut about the water,
Sails full of willing Easterly's,
Ladies in their finery
And dockers full of ale.

I've heard with my own ears,
The jangle of polished brass
Atop the restless evening air.
Listened in as lovers
Spoke of promises and partings.

And I've felt the weight,
The weight of each and every guarding Elm
And stone laid down
Upon my acres.
And just as this old city
And the spirit of the Leithers
Who have trod my grassy sprawl,
I too,
Will endure.

J. Pennington-Twist

Leith – A Short Story

As I stroll through Leith in the pub drunken people scream when Hibs score but when the opposition score it goes silent.

The roars of the Hibs fans are like lions as I keep walking. It just goes AHHHH! to silence until the match ends. Then I reach my destination of the restaurant and Bar of Valvona and Crolla for a scrumptious burger and fries with a Fanta.

Arlo Rogers, age 11

Glint of Silver in the Sun

The sun was out one of those May suns shining on the trees and the tarmac while Stephen stood in the shade of the hill under Broughton Street and put flame to the end of a long joint.

Aw thats good like he said

I looked at him standing in front of me Bigger than us I thought; John says hes no in school anymore and you could see it. Big arms and just the way he rolled you could tell.

Where did you find this?

Just a boy at ma bit, house next door, John said.

Its good like he said again and passed it to Dean who didn't know what to do with it and the boys started laughing

Took it in my hands after Dean and I was shaking, took the smoke into my lungs and then again. Stephen spat. I watched the spit on the gravel and I passed it and my hands were shaking. I looked at him and I thought hes no in school anymore. School he go to?

-Trinity

-Aw right

He had his bike under him, bouncing on the seat, fingers over the brakes, big hands.

You fae here?

Leith I lied. Always said Leith.

You a hibe?

Yeah (oh!) aye, I am.

Good man, he said. I was happy he called me a good man. I was proud of that so I said you go to the game last week?

Cudnae go

John, I said. Lets go through there and I pointed to the tunnel and he said are you mental? I said no.

Just rubble at the back they said but the darkness behind the steel fence made it tempting. The bushes grown over the wall, bricks and cement running across and the plants grown over like arms and fingers.

Stephen took the last few draws rapid, deep inhales. Took out a fag. Want one?

Nah mate

Cool John said. We're gonnae head through there. Stop off in Tesco for a bite teat, some crisps or that.

Lac comes down the steps from the road above. Dean the gimp. Why dyou muck about wi Dean?

Hes sound

Is he fuck

You blazed mate? yer eyes are red. Aye good shit said Stephen.

My head was spinning. John and Dean laughing. Lac said something leaning nearby small bit of scaffolding behind the goalposts. Leaning with his arms up grinning stretched so that you could see the hair above his adidas (no boxers, need to tell John!) and said you ken that guy that died?

Nah said John and Lac said thought you kend him and then pulled out a swiss army knife, taking the blade out and the silver of it glinting in the

sun and I said

Lets go.

Clouds came in and we jumped the fence and walked into the tunnel with John behind and Dean at the other side of the fence; Stephen cycled away and Lac still standing there grinning in the darkening day.

Darkness for a few minutes; it got very cold after a minutes walk into the tunnel, then light and the Tesco car park and Gavin pushing trollies along the gravel, yellow jacket over hoodie started raining hard, getting Gavin soaked to the bone.

Gavin Dean said. The trollies rattling over the gravel, the stones and his jacket bright yellow and silver like a builders and hair gelled and now raindamp.

Gavin!

Aye? What is it mate?

Nuthin said Dean, nothing in his eyes, weed got to his head standing there like an idiot.

John walked into Tesco with Dean and I waited outside and watched the raindrops drop on the floor and form puddles and Gavin pushing the trollies in a massive line, wheels rattling and going haywire, twisted in different directions over the floor.

fuck sake he said.

The rattling was loud much too loud and its only the weed I thought then John and Dean came out five minutes crisps and opal fruits in hand and John said Lacs got some stuff should we go to his?

Dean said

aye

and I said alright and so we walked up the trolley ramp, zig zagging up it one after the other munching handfuls of opal fruits, Dean eating them with the wrappers still on, just shoving them in his mouth like that, swallowing with the paper on.

Walked to Lacs together, the two of us and Dean -- Walked to the graveyard then ten minutes till the canal then crossed one road then another and got to Lacs and pressed the bell till we saw the shape of his Mum at the door.

She opened and said:

Lacs through there

and we walked inside whole house smelling of grass, thick with smoke, his mum worse for it than Lac, little brother Sean on his bed sipping Irn Bru from the can and on the playstation.

Seans doin ma head in said Lac

and walked out and I followed and John behind while Dean sitting next to wee Sean stretched out an arm asking for a shot on the playstation and kept reaching his hand out fingers covered in crumbs from the crisps.

Moaning Gee us a shot

In the back green two boys kicked a ball and us and Lac sat or stood over watching him roll. Lac lit up drew it into his lungs and let the smoke out slowly head tilted up.

I said what did Sean do?

Lac held the spliff out after he was done with it and John wasn't looking so Lac just held it there and then one of the boys in the corner shouted

watch out

Loud and the football took the spliff clean out of Lacs hand sent it flying

into the wall.

I watched it almost frozen come out of his hands and thrown into the corner of the backgreen and Lac saying fuck sake! And then walking towards the boys, us thinking he just wanted to square goes but he took out the knife id seen in the park, walking steady to the two boys.

The two boys started laughing till they saw the knife in Lac's hand holding it down below his waist with the blade out.

The boys couldn't have been more than twelve I thought.

A didnae mean it one said (must have been the one that kicked the ball) and the other one just started crying, proper tears running down his face in buckets.

Then Lac stopped and smiled and he put the knife in his pocket and walked towards us past the washing lines in the sun just grinning, walking towards us with that look on his face --dark brown eyes-- slits now from the smiling in the cold sun of May.

Theo Christodoulidis

La Lluvia de Leith

para los exiliados madrileños, 2 de abril de 2020

Será luna de miel
en el piso-cárcel
con tu media naranja
y Escocia os va a escocer un poco.
Welcome to the Hotel Caledonia –
se puede entrar, no se puede salir,
¡naranjas de la China!
No hay un calabozo más amable,
¡no llores!
La lluvia de Leith,
esta lluvia escocesa cae,
cae sobre todos sin discriminación.
Que disfrutéis esta luna sorpresa,
media luna de miel;
no hay miel sin hiel
de la naranja cajel
y el gusto agridulce
de las mieles misteriosas,
mieles de la luna, luna.

Honeymoon in Leith

for a Spanish couple locked down, 2 April 2020

For Vero and Rubén, a honeymoon–
springtime in New York!
But that was before, before Covid
and now,
locked down in Leith,
it's welcome to the Hotel Caledonia–
you checked in, now you can't leave,
no way, so stay!
Don't cry,
you couldn't be confined
in custody more comfy
and this rain of Leith falls,
falls equally without discrimination.
Savour these days
of bittersweet,
your Seville orange, other half,
enjoy this unexpected hive
of honeys of the moon, the moon.

David Bleiman

The Hideout

Every single week me, my brothers and my Dad always go to this café called the Hideout. You may think what is so special about a random café in Leith, well this isn't an ordinary one. Well, for me at least, the reason it's so great is, every time we go, no matter how we are physically, emotionally or just not bothered, we always go to the Hideout and it will always make us feel better. The food isn't completely the best but the staff are so so kind and welcoming and feel like family. It's hard to explain why, but it has a special place in my heart.

Tom Duncan, age 11

Leith Links

I grab the keys labelled "Flat keys" and shove them in the pocket of my old puffer jacket. I pull the dog leash off the many hangers on the wall. "Walkies!" I yell while slightly jingling the keys around, soon there was the sound of skidding feet coming closer, I moved her collar round her neck to find the loop to put the leash through, the small bell hanging off of it was hitting a small metal tag with the word "Lucy" carved into it. I twist the doorknob with one hand. When the door opens I am greeted with the flights of stairs I see each morning, going down the steps. I tread past doors 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, I open the main door when I reach the bottom of the stairs, and I get struck by the sound of a big car zooming past on the cobblestone road and the stink from the recycling bins. I make sure Lucy made her way out with me and I close the door behind me, then we take a left turn towards the bins. We always go left on morning walks and every time Lucy goes to sniff whatever it is beside the bins and I have to pull her away because she's so close to eating things like a half-empty fish and chips box that has been there for about a month. As we carry on my eyes start wandering through the street, even though I have lived here long enough to know the licence plate on every car. I look into some people's windows, catching a glimpse of the different characters living in Leith. Dozing off parents working from home, with a dim desk lamp glowing onto their eyes, or people relaxing on their sofas, watching the news or the latest David Attenborough documentary. Lucy wakes me up. When we move on there's a silent area except from the occasional squawk of a seagull, it's completely silent. Soon the flats turn to houses, every brick a different colour, every window with a different view...

Nina-Rosa Gunson-Milne, age 11

Leith you lead me

Leith you lead me
down to the docks

Where swan eggs sit
on scabbled rocks

Where moorhen chicks
scamper on twigs

Where seagulls dive,
for salty chips.

Leith you lead me
down to the docks

When coffee yawns
and Sunday knocks

When people traipse
about the place

When legs make haste,
mind quits the race.

Leith you lead me
down to the docks

Who can we trace
fishing old smocks

Who brought new trade
to Scottish shores

Who creates songs,
to settle scores.

Leith you lead me
down to the docks

What ships are these
that honour jocks

What art is this
remembering

What heart is here -
succumbing to,

Leith.

Alex Beata Clarke

The Idiot Son

(small talk in a Covid ghost-town, 27 March 2020)

“What’re we gonna do for food now dad? Now we can’t just hang around an open door?”

“Son, it’s not like we’re ever really poor. We’ll do what we did when I was a kid. Your granddad and me went shopping in the sea and had fish, fresh and sweet for tea.”

“Go to sea? No thanks It’s freezing cold and gives me the fear. I’d rather stay and eat here, where we’ve been able to have fish with chips and ketchup and cheese.”

Idiocy then received its full reward: His head rang and in a sulk he began.

“What was that for?! What have I done?”

“That’s for being your mother’s idiot son. Ketchup and cheese indeed! Like it or not we’re going to sea.”

“I don’t wanna go out to sea I wanna go down the Hib’s, there’s always a good meal to be had down at the ‘cabbage and rib’s.”

“Fer God’s sake the game’s off, c’mon now get a move on, you’re a grown seagull not a kid.”

Jim Laing

Pass It On

7.30am

Nasirah

When I told my gran I was moving to Edinburgh, she told me I was far too friendly to live there. She said the word ‘there’ like it offended her to say the city’s name. She said that nobody talks to you at the bus stop in Edinburgh. That people there would pretend they didn’t see you fall over rather than stop and help you. She said Edinburgh folk don’t chat to their neighbours.

I told her, well, gran, it sounds like they need me there to help them change that. And besides, I’m moving to Leith. It’s different.

This morning I chapped on Clara’s door at half seven. I’d made my tea and realised I had no milk. I don’t like tea with no milk in it, it lacks comfort. I said Clara, I need your help and waved my mug. She let me in, I went to her fridge, and I put some milk in my tea.

I was going to ask her what she was up to today, but I think I’d got her out of bed. I like a chat but I’m not a nutter, so I just gave her a wee pat on the arm and I went back across the landing to my flat.

9.30am

Clara

From the kitchen window you can just about see the Castle, if you stand

on a chair. From the bedroom window, stand on the same chair, lean to your left, and on a clear day, you can spot Inchkeith Island and its lighthouse. My flat has excellent views, even if you need a bit of help to see them.

After Nasirah woke me up, I went back to bed and lay there, thinking about how easily that girl asks for help. At half past eight, I got up and phoned for an appointment.

Today has to be lucky. I put on my lucky pants. They are the granddaughters of my original lucky pants, because when you find a style that fits, you keep buying them. This is one of the Important Lessons of the last two years.

Some other Important Lessons in the appearance department include:

My meaty calves look good in shiny tights.

Everything about me looks better when my distracting knees are covered.

I suit blue (I reflect, as I put on a blue jumper).

The longer my hair gets, the more gently I have to dry it.

High heels are flattering on meaty calves, but they are noisy and make me even taller, so they are best avoided if I don't want extra attention.

I move through the flat as I drink coffee, butterflies in my stomach. This place wasn't nice when I moved in. But I took my time and made it home. I changed the way it looked. There's not much I could do about being on the top floor and only having two bedrooms, but it feels better now, roomier, cleaner. I got some help. I put in the work. I made this.

I owe it to myself to live the life I want.

I walk down Easter Road and at the junction I wait for the lights to change. It feels vulnerable to stand still, but I look around and sure enough, nobody is watching. I have learned to avoid the foot of Easter Road at

lunchtime or morning break. Black v-necks and trousers and too-short skirts everywhere, hurling abuse, hurling bacon rolls, that time I went home with noodles stuck to my back. Little shits.

The Surgery is down some steps and I wonder, how can such a dingy place improve folk's health? I try not to consider all the germs passing through here day after day. Mask on, deep breath. Buzz the buzzer.

"I have an appointment with Doctor Elliot at 10.15."

She asks me for my name and tells me to take a seat.

I wait. I have endured two years of hurdles. Perhaps This Is It. Am I excited? Am I scared?

A tiny woman with a kind face walks into the waiting room. She calls out.

"Kevin Davies?"

I jump up before I remember to walk tall, look confident, lengthen my fingers before pushing my hair away from my face. If she's confused by my name or my appearance, she doesn't show it, and I love her for it. She smiles warmly and leads me to her room where I sit in a blue bucket chair. Blue suits me. It's a sign.

"My name's Sarah Elliot, I'm one of the doctors here. What has brought you here today, Kevin?"

And so it begins. "I need your help."

1.30pm

Sarah

She tells the reception that she's taking a walk. Do you know it's half past

one? Afternoon triage starts in half an hour. She knows, she promises she'll be quick.

She heads for the car park out the back and she's so excited to see him that she's almost skipping. He hears her, and that gorgeous yellow head appears and he sticks his nose up to the opening in the window as she unlocks the car.

She opens the door and he tumbles out, so excited he doesn't know where to put himself. Where have you been it's so good to see you I missed you so much yes I am a good boy yes I am give me scratches oh you've got the ball good now let's go to the park!

And they are together and the rest of the world fades away.

They hurry to the Links. Barney joyfully races through a gang of gulls who cry and take flight. Sarah throws the ball. Barney gives chase. Sarah laughs. Two, three, four times.

This is joy. The morning is forgotten - the boredom (Barney), the fly that came in the open window (Barney), the time someone walked past and he thought it was her (Barney); the bad news to be broken (Sarah), the judgement to be suspended (Sarah), the effort of giving diagnosis and solution and empathy in just seven minutes (Sarah); the seemingly endless waiting to be together (Sarah, Barney).

There is a squirrel and Barney is off, the warm breeze in his coat, free as the gulls. Sarah picks up the ball and laughs, longing to sit down, to lie on the grass and stare up at the clouds, to savour this moment. But patients could be anywhere, so there's no space here to be a human.

Instead she stays crouched for a moment, the stretch in her back is glorious, the feeling of the grass under her hands, the sound of the wind in the trees.

As she unfurls again she sees her watch with panic. How can it already be

ten to two? She calls for Barney, getting the lead ready.

Barney? Barney? The Links spreads out around Sarah, entirely devoid of yellow dogs. She jogs to the path to see behind the trees, then to the hill for a better view, all the time her breathing getting faster, her chest getting tighter.

She throws herself down the hill again, adrenaline making the world pass in slow motion, knowing her legs are out of her control. She flies at the group of teenagers in black shoes, black trousers, black jumpers. They are young, fit people, and most importantly, there are many of them.

"Please", says Sarah, "I need your help."

1.45pm

Jeff

I turned the key in the lock and Sherbet nearly knocked me over. I wondered how long she'd been on her own today. A lonely dog being taken out by a lonely human, I tried not to think. True, one of the reasons I do this job is because it doesn't involve many humans; but it's sad to think that only dogs know I exist. Like a five-foot-ten dog whistle.

I picked up her lead and I saw a row of cereal boxes on a shelf. It's a family house so they had all the good ones, the kind they're not allowed to put wee toys in any more. My stomach rumbled and I imagined how easy it would be to help myself to a bowl.

And I remembered how easy it would be for them to find another dog walker, so I clipped on Sherbet's lead and off we went.

By the time we reached the grass, I realised my lunch options were limited. I'd been round at Craig's yesterday and he made me some toast;

and the day before I had the last of the weekend's soup. But there was nothing today, nothing till Thursday when Sherbet's family would leave me an envelope on the kitchen counter.

I was starting to despair when someone started shouting. It was that familiar, persistent "haw! haw mister!" that can lead to a request for money, or an insult, or a kicking. I put my head down and walked faster, but they didn't stop. The fear started and I was about to turn around and take Sherbet home, but then there was someone standing in front of me.

"Please mister, you've got to help us find a missing dog! That woman over there's in bits! It's a golden retriever, eh?"

He was only young, a bit spotty, and as I looked up I realised there were loads of them, all over the Links in pairs, dressed in black and carrying rucksacks, running out in all directions, shouting "Barney! Barney!". There was a woman carrying a lead and a ball looking anxious, trailing behind them, like she might start crying.

So I took the ball from her and let Sherbet sniff it. She got it straight away, smart dog. She turned towards the tennis courts and pulled on the lead, so I let her off and she bounded away. The rest of us followed, like a monochrome flashmob. Right enough, there was the retriever, nose under the hedge on the tennis courts. Sniffing for the rats, I bet.

I tried to explain that it was just as well I wasn't out with the French Bulldog because they can smell nothing, not even bad cheese. I tried to say that springer spaniels like Sherbet aren't the best sniffers, but they're friendly, so that's why the drugs squad use them. But she wasn't listening, she was hugging me, a tiny woman giving me a hug on the Links, and the kids were all laughing and clapping.

I felt quite useful. My heart was racing, but for once it didn't feel like a panic attack. It felt all right.

I took Sherbet back home. I wondered how long it'd been since she'd had

an adventure. She seemed happy, that whippy tail going mental. "Well done, girl. You saved the day." I fed her and locked the door behind me.

I went back across the Links, past the murals, through the churchyard, under the bunting, laughed at the squirrels (are they always that funny?). I opened my email on my phone and look for the flagged message that's been sitting there for a fortnight, the one named Food Bank Voucher. It was time to get some lunch.

I pushed open the skinny door of the church hall and a young woman in jeans smiled at me. Her name badge said she was Sandra.

I smiled back and I said "I need some help."

3.00pm

Sandra

Sandra waves as Jeff leaves and she locks the hall door behind him. She walks briskly back to Andrew. "He said he was a dog walker. I wonder how much he charges? My mum needs someone to take Bronte out. I should have asked."

"Did we have everything he needed?" asks Andrew.

"Yup. He'd had his coupon for a couple of weeks so I think he was a bit shy. He says he'll come back next week. I'll keep an eye out for him."

"Good work, Sandra. You've got a good way of making folk feel comfortable. That's a talent, that is."

Sandra smiles. "I think you just need to smile and listen, don't you? That helps."

"Don't underestimate yourself. You're doing a great job. Right, you go off

home, I'll finish up here. You've not stopped all day."

"I'm just going to put the new stock in the boxes before I head off."

Andrew rolls his eyes, knowing that arguing will be futile. "I'll help you then. There's no point in working yourself into the ground, Sandra, that's not how you help people. If you're exhausted you can't be your helpful, cheery self."

They work in silence for a few minutes. Then suddenly there's a thump and a kshhhh and a sob and Andrew feels a barrage of tiny bullets hitting his shins. He turns around and Sandra is sliding her back down the wall into a freshly laid carpet of red lentils.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't - " she sobs "I'm just tired - " and she's sitting on the floor with her head in her hands and her body is shaking with sobs.

Andrew kneels on the lentils and puts his hand on her arm. He waits as the levee breaks. After a while he gets a packet of tissues out of his cardigan pocket and hands them to Sandra. Andrew has been suspecting something like this since Sandra started volunteering here.

"You don't have to tell me anything", says Andrew, "But if you want to talk, I'm here."

Andrew sits beside her, because the lentils are hurting his knees, and she leans her head on his shoulder, sniffing and sobbing.

Through a soggy tissue she thanks him. "It's my mum. She needs a dog walker because she, she can't walk any more. Her Parkinsons has got a lot worse this year. I can't leave her alone now. I can only come here if her neighbour can sit with her. I've given up teaching the evening classes, and I've not been to the gym since February. And I don't want to stop coming here. When I'm not busy I can't stop crying. Being here is good, helping people is good, being busy is good. But - " and that's all she can

say before the sobs come back.

Andrew waits till the sobs subside. He tells her he'd love to help if he can, he'd love to meet her mum and have a chat about carer's support services, because he knows there's help out there for her and that she doesn't have to put her entire life on hold.

Sandra smiles. "Would you do that, Andrew? I would love to have your help. I'd really appreciate it."

7.30pm

Andrew

I stroll down the road to the bus stop. The evening is warm and bright and Great Junction Street is jumping. A crowd is pouring out of Leith Viccies with yoga mats and big laughs; a gang of old timers are outside the pub, apologising to the folk who can't get past because they've taken up the whole pavement. A car waiting at the lights is blasting out 500 Miles, and the queue outside the chippy is singing along and bouncing.

Sandra let me cook dinner for her and her mum. She seemed happier after a chat and a rest. I'm taking my own advice and getting the bus - I could walk home, but I've been on my feet all day and you can't be nice when you're knackered. I'm in the mood for sitting down and watching Leith go by me.

As usual, the queue for the bus isn't a queue, it's a gathering. Folks mooching about on their phones, smokers, blethers, combining with old geezers coming out the bookies and the Tam O'Shanter. Anyone in a hurry to get anywhere needs to take their chances and walk on the road. I try to tuck myself in beside the bus shelter and watch.

When the bus comes I hang back and let everyone else on first. When I step on, I shove my hand in my pockets and with a razor-sharp clarity, I realise I've left my wallet in the kitchen at Sandra's flat. I look at the bus driver and go to explain, but I can see from his face that he's heard it all before. I shrug and turn around - well, the walk will burn some calories anyway.

But then someone calls, "I'll get it for you", and taps their card on the reader. The driver shuts the door before I can get off and looks at me with a "hurry up and sit down" nod.

I look around at my good samaritan. A blue jumper, long skirt, shiny tights and a big smile. I take the seat next to her.

"Thanks so much", I say. "I really appreciate your help. I left my wallet in my friend's house."

She looks at me. "No problem. I like paying it forward. We all need help sometimes, don't we?"

Elsbeth Alexandra

Lost at Sea

Rusty lockers rattle as they stomp past
The stench of desperation clings, overpowering
the lingering clouds of hastily sprayed fragrance
A minute late the bell rings
Their violence now hidden by noisy silence
Words cut deep to create invisible scars
Patterns emerge ; a galaxy of stars
Lost at sea, a firefly without a mast

Newhaven lighthouse beckons from the shore
A boy waits there, a harbour in a storm
We laugh as the skies begin to pour
Taking refuge in the warm
The water dances in the jarring breeze
And in his arms I'm finally at ease

Anoushka Ross, age 16

Leith Links

My personal connection to Leith is I used to live in Leith.

I used to live in Leith when I was little, and when I was first born my Great uncle met The Proclaimers and they gave him their song Sunshine on Leith. He gave that song when I was born.

I remember my mum telling me about my Great Grandad. He was a whaler and his boat used to dock in Leith. And now me and my friends cycle down and eat an ice cream where his boat used to dock and look at the water shimmering in the sun and look at the water he sailed on long ago.

I think he would like that.

Ava Hutchinson

The Other Leith Links

As a child, I lived at one end of Ferry Road and Leith lived at the other, and on a Saturday (only on a Saturday), my mother and I would pilgrimage to the centre of Leith, to the shrine, to a place of importance, to a place of religious status.

We boarded the number one bus: a single decker with smokers. We were all smokers on buses these days, passive or otherwise. I was never comfortable with the journey: I would usually overheat due to a duffle coat and scarf that was unnecessary. I would constantly ask my mother:

‘Are we there yet, how many stops, how many stops to go?’

Then the bus would arrive for all the passengers to spill into the busy Great Junction Street, and there was one thing great about Great Junction Street: our destination,

The Pork Butchers for link sausages (tomato). The other Leith Links.

Allan Buchan

The Lady of the Links

Charles Keane reached the Foot of Leith Walk, turned around, and started uphill again. He very nearly allowed himself to sit down on the step of a haberdashery, but the ache in his stomach forced him to walk on. He had never known hunger like this.

He was teetering on a precipice; now the hunger drove him on like a beast in harness, now it weakened him to the point of collapse. He was like a marionette, suddenly without the God-like hand of the puppeteer dancing above his head. Like the puppets he had watched at the Michigan State Fair. His memories of the carnival seemed to belong to someone else, to another life. The lights and music. Clara Miller on his arm as they stooped into a tent to find out what their future would be. An engagement ring.

But it was useless to dwell on memories of the carnivals he had loved so much before he came to Europe. Before the fire, before the death. Before a war America was never going to join, at least not until the Lusitania went down. Innocent souls drifting through the murk to lie on the seabed. The fortune teller didn't see that coming. As a merchant seaman, Charles Keane had felt it was natural that he should join the Navy. And now, because of what had happened in the North Atlantic, he could never go home. He wouldn't be forced back onto a ship, even at gunpoint.

The memory of the carnival with Clara strong-armed its way back into his mind when he thought he saw her in the crowd moving up the Walk. He found her eyes with his. It wasn't her, of course, just another girl with auburn hair. He held the girl's gaze until shame forced him to look away. When he dared to raise his eyes again, she was gone.

Before the war he had never cared how he looked in the eyes of anyone else. All that counted was that he knew he was on the right track. But it was now painfully clear to him that the folk he passed in the street didn't see a war hero when they looked at him. He didn't think himself a hero, but neither did he consider himself a beggar, and a beggar was surely what they saw when they happened to glance at his shrunken frame dragging itself uphill towards Edinburgh.

He had stopped everywhere, asking for work. The reply was always the same: sorry but no, the men had all come back, or the women had stayed where they were, they would most likely have the vote any day now, hadn't you heard? Still he trudged on, up and down the broad thoroughfare, surrounded by the relentless noise of the motors and the horses and the trams, the cries of the hawkers and the employed people, secure in work and full-bellied, the boom of the city from one direction and the howl of the wind off the Forth from the other, and the 'sorry, no work here' running like a motif through the whole discordant symphony. But his pursuit was unrelenting, and he stopped everywhere twice, the Sisyphus of Leith Walk.

Outside a grocer's shop, a hand found its way onto Charles' sunken shoulder, and a man's voice found his ear: 'You look like a bowl of stew wouldn't do you any harm, pal'. Charles could have wept, either from relief, or from the cruelty of the joke. But, as he turned to look into the face of his new companion, he recognised a warmth that he hadn't encountered in weeks.

'You have no idea', was the only response he could manage. The man smiled at him beneath his moustache, and Charles knew from the crinkles that formed in the corner of his eyes that the man had been too old to serve in the war, but only just.

'So, you're a yank. A veteran?' Charles nodded. The man introduced himself as Bram McAllister of the local Socialists, a friend to those in want following the war, especially if they had served. He asked if Charles

knew the Anchor & Trident pub facing onto Leith Links. Charles did, but had never been in.

‘Then get yourself along there tonight, Charlie. There’ll be stew and ale for you, in exchange for your story’.

The bells rang seven through the fog as Charles Keane crossed the cobbles outside the pub. The golden glow of the lamps within had been a beacon to him; the light promised an escape from the cold, an escape from hunger and want; a lighthouse beam drawing him out of danger and into a safe harbour. Once inside it took him a few moments to find Bram in the dim light and the noise. He was dizzy with hunger. Bram embraced him like an old friend and offered him a stool at an upturned barrel in the darkest corner of the pub. A jug of frothy ruby ale and three glass tankards sat atop the barrel like a crown.

‘This’, said Bram, ‘is Great Michael’. Great Michael, swathed in shadows, leaned forward into the lamplight. He was the biggest man that Charles had ever seen, a giant of a man even when sitting down. His green eyes twinkled as some previously unknown species of smile hatched from his Caliban-lips. Great Michael must have recognised the fear in Charles’ awe-stricken face as he let out a booming laugh, before downing what was left of his ale. Then he grabbed up the jug in his immense paw, and sloshed some ruby into two tankards, one of which he pushed across to Charles. With a smile and a ‘cheers’, Charles put the tankard to his cracked lips and took a draught of the beer, which fizzed down his throat and instantly hit the emptiness of his gut.

He bent forward in pain, though he attempted to smile appreciatively for fear of offending Great Michael. The behemoth laughed again. ‘Stew first’, he thundered. Someone started playing a jig on a fiddle in the depths of the barroom as a bowl of steaming stew was placed in front of Charles. It was the best thing he had ever tasted.

He was barely listening to Bram as he hungrily started on his second serving of stew. Bram spoke of the Socialist’s efforts around Leith to recruit adherents to the cause, of how they were trying to kindle hope. But all Charles could think of was staving off starvation for another day. Bram’s sermon reached an agitated crescendo as the din of the barroom got steadily louder; the more ale that was consumed the louder the shouting of the men around the bar. The louder the men became the louder the fiddler had to play his jigs to be heard over them.

Despite the racket, Charles could have put his head on his arm and gone straight to sleep as soon as he finished his stew. Great Michael must have noticed the drowsiness in his face, for he reached across the barrel and nudged Bram on the shoulder, which nearly knocked him off his stool and caused him to slosh beer down his front. Bram steadied himself and glared at Great Michael, whose great head, like the bow of his namesake leaving harbour, nodded towards Charles and his drooping eyelids. Bram understood.

‘Now’, he said. ‘Time for ale. Drink up, yank. You owe us your story’. Now the ale sat well with Charles, and tasted good and sweet, and the faster he drank the faster he seemed to regain his strength. As the beer flowed he told them everything; how he had enlisted in the Navy early in the war and left America for the first time; how he’d seen the Northern Lights from the shore of Hoy; of the storm of fire that had engulfed his ship when the Germans attacked. He told them how he had reached out for the hand of his best friend as the ship rushed to the bottom of the Atlantic, but found only water and steel. How he had been pulled out of the sea half-drowned.

He told them how ship-work was the only work he’d ever known, but that he could never do it again. He could never re-cross the ocean, never go home. The sea held nothing in its infinite fathoms for him now but terror. But he didn’t tell them everything. He didn’t tell them about Clara Miller, or the engagement ring. He didn’t tell them how she had likely given him

up for dead and married someone else. He didn't tell them about the lies that fortune tellers told. Bram's eyes remained fixed on Charles as he downed what was left in his tankard.

'Listen Charlie', he said as he poured more drinks, 'the sea can be cruel, damned cruel. It takes, takes, takes'. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. 'We Leithers have lost much to it. Much and many'. The fiddler's tunes were mournful now, and a hush had descended on the room. Glasses clinked together. A match was struck. Great Michael's eyes twinkled like polished jade in the gloom. 'There are many ghosts in Leith', said Bram. 'In fact', he almost whispered as he gazed towards the window, 'there's one out there on the Links as we speak'.

'Many folk whisper about her, those that have seen her. A lonesome lass walking the Links at night. If you call out to her, or try to get near, a mist comes and carries her away. Her name's lost to time; she's just the Lady of the Links now. Lived a hundred years ago, or more. During the war with Bonaparte, she met a sailor whose ship was docked here. Gave him her heart. He gave her his. But it was hopeless'. Bram took a long gulp of drink before carrying on with his tale.

'The sailor's shore leave was up, and he had to sail away again to blast cannon at auld Boney's lot. They met on the Links, the night he was to leave. He told her he'd marry her. Leave the Navy, even if had to be desertion. But he needed one last wage to give them a start in life, and so he must set sail. Swore that he'd return. He would meet her there, he told her, on the Links, and all would be wonderful and blessed for them both forever. And so he went, and so she waited'.

Charles' head was swimming with the beer, and with thoughts of Clara. He had a vision of her waiting for him to return. How could he have kept her waiting so? He was gripping the handle of the glass tankard tightly; it was the only way he could stop the tears. Great Michael topped up their glasses.

'He would have returned to her too', Bram went on, 'only the sea had other plans. His ship hit rocks on its way home. All souls lost. When his waiting lover heard the news, she refused to believe it. Night after night, she would stalk across the Links, searching for him, calling his name. There was never any reply, of course, except from scoundrels making merry of her misery. It never stopped her. The people who lived here about the Links would open their windows and shout curses at her; sleepless nights were had on account of her caterwauling. Of course, none lost as much sleep as she did herself. Workers rising at dawn would pass her on the Links, still awake, staring blankly with her mouth wide open, seeming half dead. She'd gone mad with grief. A year to the day after her sweetheart's ship went down, they found her dead in the morning sun, her tears not yet dried. Like the dew, they said.

She walks the Links even now, still waiting for her love, still calling out to him. A hundred years of torment, all for the want of a sailor on leave, for a hand to hold at night. I've never seen her, before you ask. But others have. Great Michael here has heard her, haven't you? Great Michael nodded, unwavering. Charles gazed towards the window, his eye trying to penetrate the night beyond. Yet he could only see Clara. Clara. She was waiting for him. He rose unsteadily to his feet, knocking his stool over backwards, and saw off the last dregs of his drink. 'I'm going to find her', he said, before leaving the lamplight and the fiddler's ballads behind him as he stumbled out into the mist.

Charles tripped over the cobbles, the shrouded world spinning around him as if he was in the centre of a colossal zoetrope. He laughed, a laugh that would have been impossible for him a few hours ago. But now, with stew and ale converted to hope and courage, there was a swaggering determination in him that he thought had been lost to the seabed forever. He knew he had to reclaim his life, his love. He knew, somehow, that the Lady of the Links was his way back to Clara.

The light of the street lamps gave the mist a golden-brown hue, which suddenly gave way to the night. He had reached a frontier of darkness. There was nothing ahead of him but grey space, and her. He stepped

forward, and felt the cold crunch of grass beneath his feet as he left the cobbles behind. The Links. He eased his way into the mist, which seemed to hinder his hearing just as much as his sight; all sound was stifled but the thumping of his heart. He suddenly found himself on an incline and swore at the effort he had to exert in the ascent. But before he knew it he had summited the peak and was on his way down the other side sharply, his legs getting away from him as he reached level ground again. He wondered if it had been some sort of burial mound, and worried he'd disturbed the resting place of some long forgotten warrior.

He squeezed his eyes shut tight, as if trying to wake himself up. After all, the ghost he sought was real, not bred of his drunken imagination. Then, on the very edge of his perception, the dimmest of lights appeared. Charles was drawn towards it, the mist dispersing in the glow as he got closer. A street lamp. He had reached a path. More lamps beyond revealed themselves hazily, fighting through the obscure vapour to make themselves known.

It was then that he saw her. The Lady of the Links. Standing on the path beneath the nearest lamp, staring straight ahead, unmoving. Charles froze. Despite the fear that now gripped him, Charles hoped that she would stay, that she wouldn't disappear. He wasn't aware that he'd spoken aloud, but the spectre's head slowly turned to face him. She was terrible, and beautiful. Gaunt, yet strong. The eyes were heartbreak, the face resolute. Charles edged nearer. A church bell began to strike the hour, but the sound was so muted that it reminded him of being underwater, of screaming metal echoing through the depths, a ship crying out in vain to be saved though the hand of God covered its mouth to smother the sound.

Charles stumbled and fell to his knees on the path, his face drenched in salt tears. The woman's voice sounded both near and distant, as though she was whispering inside his head and shouting from the edge of the world at the same time. 'The sea can't reach you, here on the Links'. But he knew it was a lie. The sea can get to you anywhere, and there isn't a land

mass big enough to escape it. Leith, Edinburgh, the world, all seemed to be drawing away from him now, abandoning him on the Links as he wept like a lost child. The mist swirled around him, and he was in the very core of the fortune teller's crystal ball.

'Don't abandon me', he managed. 'Take me off into the mist with you and let me disappear'. The music of a merry-go-round was in the air, there was a man spitting flame, a child laughing at a puppet show, the lights of the ferris wheel rushing down to crash into the earth, and Clara was waiting, a glimmer of recognition in her eye. And she moved her lips to speak.

Rite of passage in the Port O'Leith bar

Dusty sunshine fell through the doors like a drunk,
nose down on the black-and-white chequered lino.
Smoke made leisurely art nouveau contortions
around the upright all-perceiving landlady.
I hid as I always did in my favoured corner,
fenced from the world by my not-yet-tabloid Times.
A forgettable summer's afternoon in the local –
until a bevy of happily half-drunk nurses,
impelled by the thumping jukebox, rose from their table
to dance and insisted that I – unknown, unglamorous –
join them in doing so. Well, what the hell, why not?
So I blundered and capered and made what moves I could
and the nurses laughed and the landlady saw what I did
and thought it good, and the sun wallowed on the lino.

That afternoon, far away, my mother died.
She wouldn't have approved of what she perhaps witnessed.

Rex Sweeny

Water O' Leith

A long winding river, older than time.

Starting at the Pentlands: flowing, glistening.

Calming to walk past, water rushing by.

Many bonny sights for you and me to see.

Along the shore, a breath of fresh air.

Under the trees a dark woodland tunnel.

I live very close to a waterfall.

the water slushing down.

At the top there's a calmer lake.

Swans, ducks, and birds aplenty.

Eva Whitten, age 11

The Last Links

The dog wasn't his idea. A few months after the cat had died, his wife had met a friendly beagle down on the Links and mentioned it to him afterwards. Enthusiastically backed up by his daughter, they listed the reasons why it would be good for them to get their own dog -

"He'll be great company" (True)

"It'll get you out the house." (True) "And keep you out the pub." (Not True. Archie was as much of a regular as he was.)

"Good exercise for you." (Kind of true in that they walked every day, but neither of them were particularly fast and both of them eat a lot of things that were not healthy.)

He was noncommittal at the time, but he knew her well enough to know that the decision was already made. After resisting for about a month, he gave in. It wasn't a difficult decision when it came down to it and he agreed that there was a bit a hole in their lives after Charlie died.

A week later, they met Archie at the Dog and Cat Home and that was that. He was a classic old man's dog – small, white Highland Terrier. They signed the paperwork and took him home that night.

Archie instantly attached himself to him, falling asleep on his lap on the way home in the car, which made the drive interesting, curling up at his feet later on and finally creeping onto the bed when they had gone to sleep.

He didn't do anything particularly to make the dog prefer him; Archie made the choice rather than he did. But he was the one that the wee guy went running to when they got home after a day out shopping. It was his clothes that Archie regularly slept on and it was his hands that were

sought out when the vet was giving him the booster jags or the ultimate violation of taking his temperature. His wife and daughter were both amused and slightly offended by how much he was preferred to them, but there was nothing they could do, despite showering the dog with gifts and attention whenever they got the chance.

Archie and Tam quickly developed a daily routine – up early, breakfast (Archie) then out from the house, round the Links, stopping for a cup of tea and a sausage sandwich (Tam) at Stevie's food van halfway round. Stevie usually had some leftovers or dropped scraps for Archie, which were eagerly gobbled up whatever they happened to be. After the Links walk, back to house for a lie down (Archie) and a shower/bath (Tam). Then a quick trip to the bookies, Archie making the rounds of the regulars and gleefully accepting the attention from the hands reaching down from the line of men standing looking at the television screens and pinned newspapers which lined the walls.

Then back to house for some lunch and a short nap (both of them) after the lunchtime tv news.

In the afternoon, usually a spot of shopping or a visit to one of their friends. Archie accompanied him on most of these trips. In the late afternoon, another walk round the Links (no food this time; the van closed up after the kids from the local school went back at the end of their lunch break). Then a pint at the Academy Bar, where Archie was very popular and was allowed to wander freely round, meeting everyone that he could and receiving various titbits of crisps, pie crust and if he was lucky, a bit of steak or hamburger meat.

Back home, a bit of telly and a quick trip to the garden for a pre-sleep-pee (Archie) and then to bed.

And that's the way it was for the best part of 10 years. He was pretty much the only constant in Tam's life for that period. His daughter got married and moved to Brighton. After they relocated, her and her husband made

the trip north or Tam and his wife would regularly take the train, with Archie, who loved the journey, wandering up and down the aisle meeting everyone whether they wanted to or not. Three years ago, Margaret got sick and couldn't travel any more. The cancer spread fast and despite aggressive chemotherapy, she lost her battle after two years of hospital visits, tests, consultations and finally, palliative care in a hospice.

After the funeral, his daughter stayed with him for a month to help him adapt to living on his own. Tam stopped going to the bookies and the pub. Archie was his only reason for going out. Once she went back down south, he and his daughter relied more and more on talking via the iPad they had got Tam the previous Christmas than in person. She had her own life to lead and admitted that she found it difficult to go back to the house now her mum was gone. "Aye, you and me both", Tam told her.

Tam developed a new routine with Archie, replacing the pub and the bookies visits for walks to the cemetery usually via the supermarket for some flowers. The dog enjoyed the graveside visits and seemed to understand the reason for being there. He would often lie down next to the gravestone, sometimes even falling asleep until it was time to leave.

For the last three months, however, Archie was starting to struggle with the walks. He was dragging one of his back legs. His eyes, jet black since he was a puppy, were becoming more and more milky. They had to stop so he could rest more and more often. There was a bench half way round the links about a hundred yards from the burger van that became a regular feature of their walk. Sometimes they would just go home from there if the weather was bad or Archie was particularly weak that day.

This is where they now sat, Archie's head on Tam's lap. Tam had phoned the vet earlier that week and agreed to bring his companion in for the last time that afternoon. Stevie had put aside some sausages that morning and cut them up. Archie took his time with them but finished them off, slowly licking the grease off Tam's hand when they were done.

Tam looked out over the Links, stroking the dog's head. Archie shifted under his hand and let out a cross between a groan and a sigh. He snuggled into his owner's side and then was still. Tam thought he had fallen asleep at first but then realized he couldn't wake him up. Tears brimmed in his eyes and fell silently down his cheeks as he said goodbye to his old friend. He took off his coat, shivering slightly in the cool morning air, wrapped Archie up and carried him home for the last time.

David Donovan

The Under-Leith

The streets are cold,
The statements bold,
And both will rattle your teeth.
Come force a smile,
And stay awhile,
Wi' us in Under-Leith.

For daffodils,
On warming hills,
See Calton or Dalkeith.
But our worth,
Lies by the Firth,
In cold, damp Under-Leith.

On summer days,
Through tarmac haze,
See things beyond belief.
But don't despise,
Just realise,
It's a' true in Under-Leith.

Leafs copper-red,
Fly overhead,
Look up, you may see them.
Here, our gold,
We keep and hold,
And treasure, Under-Leith.

Four seasons here,
Will chill and sear,
You will need thick skin.
But stay around,
A home you've found.
Down in the Under-Leith.

Uplifting

On the day I arranged to pick you up
I saw your two sisters at traffic lights.
They asked where I was going and I said
I had arranged to pick you up today.

And seeing them, I felt, was a good sign;
I had welcomed their support in the past.
And they both waved fondly as they drove off
and I smiled at them and headed for Leith.

I entered the sombre office and gave
your name. A smiling woman soon returned
and asked me to sign some papers. She said
that was all that I had needed to do.

And I took you away in your plastic,
burgundy jar. You seemed heavier now
than you looked the last time I had seen you.
I carried you like a sacred chalice.

The first stop was the street where you were born.
Like the good seed on the land, I scattered
you around, and your concealing spirit
rose in a Vatican puff of white smoke.

Next stop the Shore, outside the pub we used.
All those stories, discussions and debates
seemed to flood my mind in clear memories.
I took my time before sprinkling you here.

Then the bar, now changed, where we had arranged
your surprise seventieth birthday bash.
Some photographic images sprang up
as you bounced off the pavement, approving.

With the bulk of you still inside the jar,
I scrambled down a boardwalk in the shade.
I stood there looking into the river,
the Water of Leith, Firth of Forth beyond.

Cautiously, in my final act with you,
I poured you gently into the river.
You responded in a calcium cloud,
swirling and bubbling; your final comments.

And I stood there watching and listening;
your effervescence settling into soul.
One long strand seemed to grope towards the sea,
as the other stayed stubbornly in Leith.

I followed you down the boardwalk until,
incomprehensibly, I saw a can
of beer bobbing on the river's surface.
I left you then, knowing that you were safe.

From the Leith Street villains
to the Kirkgate throng,
Beneath the Walk's paving stones, Portobello beach!
As Pete Shelley sang, Boredom
is counter-revolutionary.
Run, Leithers! The old world is behind you,

Jim Aitken

When the Pilrig Church Clock Strikes 13

Its gods and masters suffer. Let them die.

Expel the policeman from your head,
All power to the imagination!
The landlords are homeless,
The banker's lament is a derivative
of songs and systems whose time has run out.
Your bosses are at the gates, their union reps carrying empty briefcases,
The corporate lawyers plead guilty on behalf of their clients,
The gallows and guillotines stand readied.
We are realists, after all. We demand only the impossible.
We will take. We will seize.
We will organise sit ins in your souls
and occupations in the margins of your ledgers.

When the last neo liberal is strangled with the last copy of the Daily Mail,
When the Granton campus dreamers twin with Gaza's colonised streets,
When the last establishment entryist is exposed and returned to their side,

When the spectacle's final reel unspools in nude ignominy,
Under cover of night, the noonday underground will emerge
From its slumbers.
In a time of monsters,
Borders and classes will dissolve,
The last Tory MP will be arrested applying for asylum off the shores of
rogue states,
While Piers Morgan hails a taxi bound for Hades.
The first Uber Soviet will announce itself
from a Depot rehearsal room,
Our shaken dew will refract previously unmapped colours,
National flags will be repurposed as the cleaning rags of the 1%,
put to work scouring flatlining money systems for signs of life.
All that was solid will recompose,

And history will begin.

'Expel the policeman from your head,' 'All power to the imagination!' reference slogans coined during the Paris 1968 student/worker uprisings. I've always been attracted to the mischief and political heresies of the young people involved in the movement of that period. Not only were they developing a revolutionary imagination which sought to bypass and eradicate bourgeois conceptions of freedom' they sought to expose what they saw as the French Community Party's conservatism and stasis. Hence the demand, 'All Power to the Imagination,' a variation of the Bolshevik's 'All Power to the Soviets!'

Mike Cowley

My Visit to Leith

I am sitting in the back of my mum's old rumbly car, feeling slightly carsick. I watch the sights of Edinburgh go by and suddenly they stop. I sit up.

Water, beautiful grey water, leading out to Fife. The water sparkled and shone in the sunlight. My mum stops the car, and I realise that the surprise my mum has been going on about is this. A fun, swimming filled beach day, here at Newhaven.

Mum laughs "Excited?"

I look at the sandy golden beach. "Heck, yeah."

"Then let's get cracking. We've got no time to waste."

Eilidh Lehenny, age 11

On visiting the Antony Gormley sculptures

Six Times.

That's the name of the installation along the Water of Leith.

And along we went clocking them all -

each lifeless figure stuck, alone, gazing off in a different direction.

But teeming in between each one there was life.

The river, mallards, water voles and rats,

the leafy silence of overhanging birch trees,

and there was you, walking and chatting with me.

Six times we stopped and six times more and more we chose to stand still.

To stand together on a rock in the Water of Leith

and feel the warmth flow from one figure to the other.

Beag Horn

The Seagull at the Shore

The seagull at the Shore

flying high in the sky,

scanning its surroundings

for a lonely worried chip.

The seagull at the Shore

staring at its prey.

The seagull at the Shore

takes your chips away.

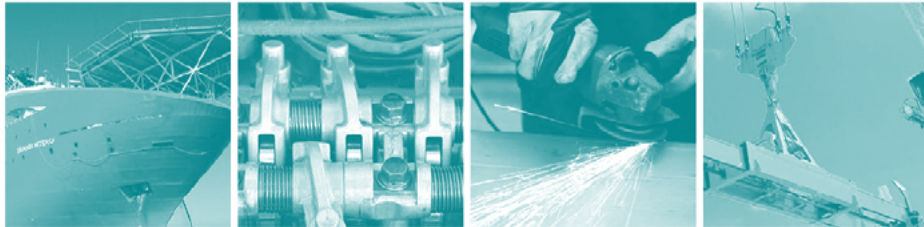
Einar Mayor, age 11



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www.georgebrown.co.uk



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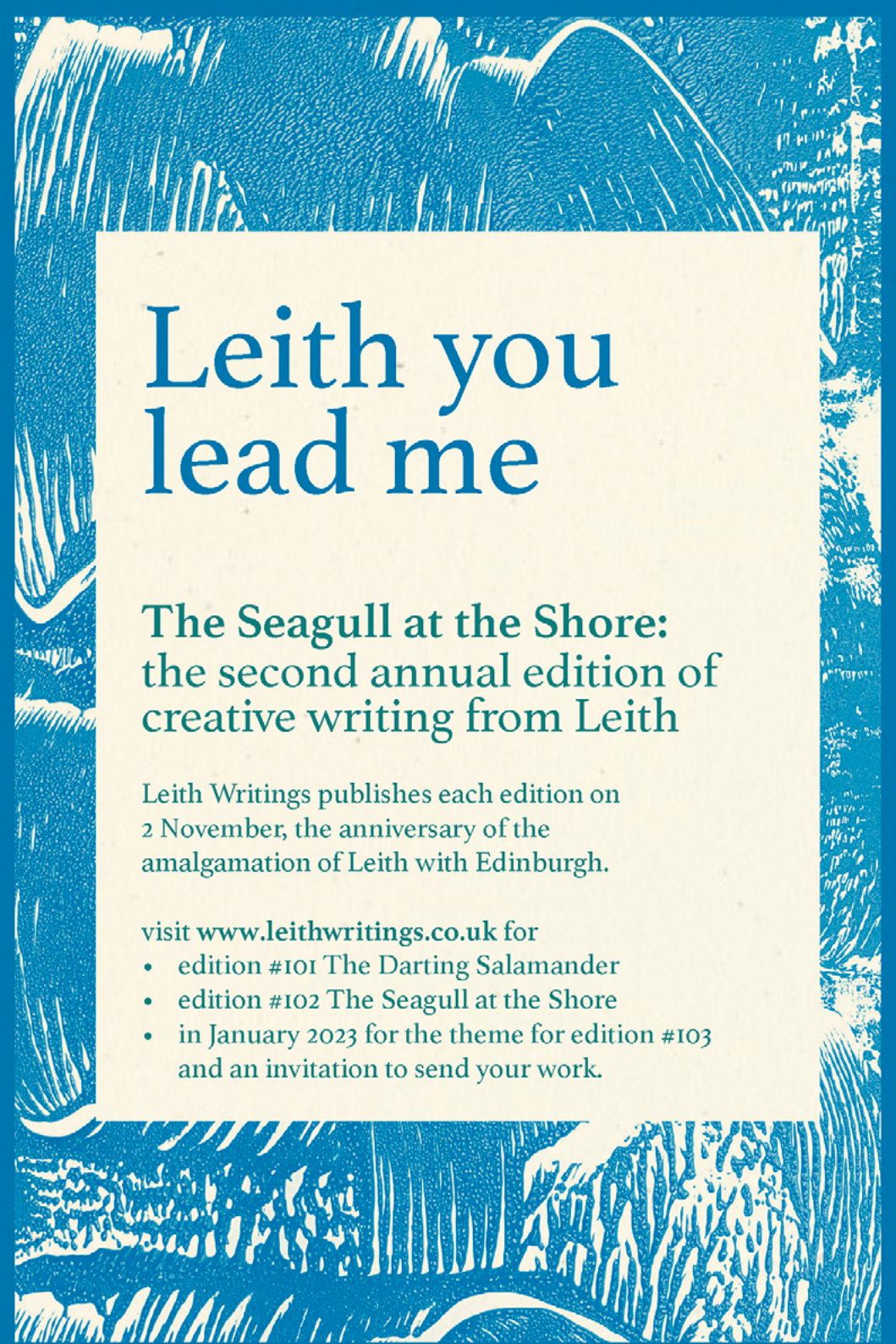
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Leith you lead me

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