

*There's a murder of crows up on Curle Street
Black-clad, they flutter and flap
While an old dear deeks down through her crow's feet
From a home at the top of the high flats*

He is awake. He is awake. He is awake. The springs in the cheap mattress makes a pinging noise just to confirm the fact that, yes, he is indeed awake. There's no alarm, as there's nothing to wake up for, no job, no leisure, no urgent commitments. Nothing to prise Eck from the bargain bed frame but some misplaced sense of Calvinistic duty that he should, at least, be doing something.

The PVC round the widows in the room shudders, barely holding the poorly sealed and thus heavily condensed glass, as the number 2 passes by, destination Baillieston or Faifley, depending on which way you decide to look up or down Dumbarton Road. Peristalsis style, this ill-fitting collection of human, glass, metal and rubber hauls itself, down through the Glasgow's guts and out to the East, soon to be regurgitated back the way, the old corporation double-deckers, decked out in their privatised mauve finery.

The yard, the shipyard! The industrious men of the Clyde! The beating heart of the second city of empire. Hard steel, fire, brimstone, and sweat. Ah, the old trope. There's still movement, heavy goods come into the industrial estate the deals now with the management of waste, the processing of rubbish. Former specialists in construction quickly lend themselves to taking thing apart. Whatever it is, wood, plastic, metal, people send it here, as if some long forgotten knowledge of what to do with raw material still lingers on in the brickwork. Waste. It's somebody else's problem now.

Unemployment is an anathema to Scottish working culture; it was no different to Eck, the state of impotent idleness creeping up on him as the day passed interminably slowly. The constant feeling of original sin, sloth, a lack of discipline. Lie long enough in bed and he could practically feel the bristles of John Knox's beard on the back of his neck like a reminder of what he must do but can't, or what he could do but mustn't.

Eck takes the stairs; the lift is stricken by neglect and paranoia of the virus. Marjorie Dawsholm is on the second floor attempting to sweep the landing. Marjorie hears Eck's footsteps and disappears inside quietly. As Eck passes her door he hears pressure on the landing and sees a flicker of an eye through the peephole. Each knows that the other is there, and that is somehow reassuring. Like the clumsy romances of little children, both Eck and Marjorie stand a moment on each side of the door, silent and pensive, before Eck continues on his way down and Marjorie breathes a sigh, one not exactly of relief.

Outside, under the union colours of the Orange Hall, whose wall, sprayed shamrock green, continues the tired to and fro, Eck begins his daily penance. Round the corner he walks. Diesel and dust, every lorry's perfume wafts over the street as they trundle by, loaded with the unwanted things of others. As the lorries drive away, so does any evidence of their being here. The café opens with a hot blast of greasy air, tempting folk off the scrapheap for a full belly, the wafting comfort of roll and filling, offered instruction to the server unto the order of how things should be done. Roll and sausage. Roll first then sausage. The other way round never made any sense anyway.

Norrie, the owner, smiles a smile hewn from 50 years of service. There's no dialogue for a while, the two men incommunicado the way that only Scots are able to do. A nod, a nudge, the hint of a smile, and a white bag, stained to see-through, crosses the counter. Eck squeezes alcohol gel on his hands, watches as it slides across the frozen palms, then rubs it deep into the dry cracks of his skin. He eats outside despite the cold, watches the van depot, its comings and goings. Mainly removals, people come here in order to go somewhere else. People come and people go. Rubbish comes and stays.

The old railway is now a bicycle path, its signs offering the highland, picture postcard glamour of Loch Lomond. The riders are like the vans, they come here to go somewhere else, the forgotten corner of Clydeside being a necessary evil in a longer storyboard leading to something altogether brighter. Eck wanders the path, but no matter how strong his determination, he can never get passed Yoker, it gets too tiring after that, and he reluctantly allows himself to be swallowed back down towards the high-flats and the familiar. The cyclists flit past with the ping of a bell, they've got the gear, the fine looking bicycles, the look

in their eyes that shows Eck that they have a luxury that he doesn't; they can come and go as they please.

He boards the bus outside the health centre; with a shuddering jolt it starts and joins the laden lorries back down to Whiteinch. The bus drops him outside the high-flats beyond which is the scrap yard. Eck thinks about the scrap, wood and metal, flesh and bone, the screeching of wire cutter, or the hurried murmur of a many men. We have been brought here, and left here, piled up neatly and abandoned to some notion of regeneration. Someone else's refuse, someone else's problem. Some vans pass by, taking new, rebuilt things to new, rebuilt places. Eck goes back inside.

Marjorie is there again, Eck doesn't see her, but he knows she's there. The tell-tale creak of uneven floorboards in uneasy union with badly-fitted linoleum give away the fact that Marjorie has been waiting for Eck to get back. They used to talk, but the constant media frenzy that heralded finality for people of their age first led them to brief words of disbelief, and then after a while, no words at all. Still, she feels safe knowing that Eck has come back. In a transitory neighbourhood, Eck is a rare pillar of permanence.

Eck enters the flat, cold from the shoogley window. He should get it fixed, like many other things, it is in need of an overhaul, to be pulled out and put back in again. A new start. The crows scatter from the windowsill as he enters the room, circling high above the block, coming and going, knowing that Eck may leave, but he will always be back. He is part of it. He is here. He is not going.

Absent-minded television, crosswords, sensationalist headlines, tinned food, microwaves. Streetlights, starting off pink turn slowly amber, lollipops of lit up cold and rain. Night-time is better; there is some sense of accomplishment, just for having made it to the end of another day. Like the scrap the lorries come and they go, complete in a circular way, finishing the well-trodden narrative provides Eck with a degree of closure, a comfort that will be shattered tomorrow by the inevitable progress of the number 2 bus and the scrap men's arrival.

*Twa corbies sit oot oan the windae
Ken jist whit it is that ye maun
They'll no care if you dae or ye dinnae
But they ken if yer comin' or gaun.*