

Over Devonport
(with apologies to Charles Causley)

by Amanda Harris

At the end of the alley, the sea
A scrumple of discarded sacks
A slap of waves on boats.
In the cove,
A waiting chorale of chancer pigeons.

In the Market Hall, the coffee brews,
Ideas are conjured, plans nurtured.
Maybe a whiff of oil paint
From the brush of Joshua Reynolds?
Or caulies, carrots and greens?

Outside the tower blocks,
Groups of men huddle in thin coats.

On Ker Street,
Old Fellows Hall flanked by Egyptian gods
Is padlocked.
Squeezed in mortar, once scented
Butterfly charmers,
Now lightless lamps.

The Red Velvet Club meet in the pillared Guildhall
To drink tea, talk films and dance.
While ghosts of felons listen below in the cells.
A small boy alone in the dark
The memory of the bruised apple on his tongue.

On Marlborough Street,
Young mums with prams gather outside 'Wow',
The promise of 'Sweets and Toys'
Displaced by shelves of multi coloured vapes in fruity flavours;
Blueberry, Candyfloss and Sweet Strawberry.

Children play loud in the primary playground.

Sailor suits, ocean charts, thick serpent coils of sisal,
Cleats, shackle pins,
Spent bullet cartridges point like fingernails,
To lure the matelot, the mechanic and the dreamer
Into Bogey Knights.

Across the way,
The towering walls of Devonport
Topped with a helix of flesh ripping razor wire.
Trapped in its clutches
Shredded plastic strips twitch in the wind.

Above it all,
The seagull glides on thermals
Unimpeded by concrete
Masonry
Or wire.

And at the end of the alley, the sea.