

Window to the soul.

The thickness of the fog clung to the shores of Pittenweem like a wet woollen blanket, muffling the crashing sound of the North Sea against the harbour walls. For Agnes the mist wasn't just weather, it was the spirit of the town blowing through the streets and calling out for her. At sixteen, she moved through her days on the shore with mechanical precision. She would gut the fish until her fingers went numb, she would religiously scrub the salt crust from the windows, once a week every Sunday. Agnes would nod politely to her neighbours, as she was instructed by her mother. Each neighbour that passed nodded back with the same meaningless politeness, each with eyes as grey as the slate roofs.

Everyone that she knew looked as if they were awaiting the arrival of a bus... of which the service stopped running a decade ago. No flicker, no spark to be seen. The only thought behind their eyes being their next warm meal or which beer the tavern would be selling later in the evening.

It was one of these evenings, seeking an escape from the suffocating reek of sea brine and boiled cabbage, Agnes headed towards the town's local park. Park was generous, it was more so that of a field set aside for dog walkers by the community. The same Oak tree, the same jagged rock and the same patch of overgrown grass that felt like a cage. She knew every twist in the red gravel path, however on this night. The geometry in that park felt somewhat different to what she remembered.

Sitting on the low stone wall was a man. A man that did not belong to the grey.

He was reed thin with a face drawn out like a map that had been long scrunched into someone's pocket. His hair was thinning, and the colour of woodsmoke. His charcoal stick was held between stained fingers. His eyes darted through the park, pulling shapes from the abyss whilst his hand danced across the page. As Anges drew closer, he looked up.

The shock of his piercing blue eyes left her breathless, behind a web of wrinkles and the cracks of his dry lips, his eyes were burning. His eyes were not the dull grey Pittenweem pebbles that Agnes had grown used to, they were burning embers. His eyes hungered for excitement.

"You've a heavy step for such a wee thing" he said. His gravelly voice betrayed him as a smoker, although Agnes could have guessed as such already. A faint knowing smile tugged at his mouth.

"I've walked this gravelled pilgrimage exactly sixteen thousand times" Anges replied, surprised by the sound of her own voice honestly. "The ground must be growing tired of me"

The man chuckled lightly, a dry rhythmic sound. "Then stop walking it, I am Brian by the way. I'm sketching the ghosts of this town before I leave them behind. Heading off for Edinburgh the

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morra to find somewhere bonnie that doesn't smell like bait. I'm heading in the morning, late as always. My friends are already there waiting for me!" `he spoke to her kindly, with all the fondness of a friend he has known for years. Agnes could tell then, when he looked at her, he did not see a child not a labourer, but a fellow traveller.

"I have never been." Agnes admitted sheepishly. There was no reason for her not to have visited the capital city of her own country. She was always just under the impression that...well... she had better things to do. Right?

"You should just come, it feels right, and some souls just aren't meant to be pickled in salt water." He chuckled lightly. However, before the final word had even left his cracked lips Agnes had made up her mind. She would "Just come".

The transition was a blur of diesel fumes and excitement. The sun dipped just below the sharp silhouette of the castle, Agnes felt like that Scotrail train had dropped her off in an entirely different dimension.

The city was a labyrinth of gold gilding and gothic architecture. The air tasted of roasted coffee around her, and the streets were paved with ancient cobblestone. Brian led her to a spot just outside of St Giles Cathedral where a small troupe of men were clearly awaiting their arrival. They were all older, around Brian's age, and eccentric to say the least. Draped in colourful frayed wool with violins that looked as if they had been salvaged from Jumble sale stall from the market.

Agnes stood by Brian, watching the chaos unfold as he drew. Her heart hammered in her chest, a feeling that she had never experienced in the East Neuk. People swirled around them. Students with mismatched clothing and ink-stained fingers gathered around debating Rembrandt and Monet, glamorous ladies walked by in fur coats emanating the smell of patchouli from every pore. Poets and musicians spoke in rhyme around them, in verses that felt like strikes of lightning every time.

"To the stars, Agnes!" one of the musicians bellowed over the swell of the violin music.

She laughed until her chest ached and drank wine from a paper cup that tasted like liquid fire and warm berries. For the first time in her life, she felt the light in her own eyes reflected by one thousand others. The city was pulsing and all Agnes wanted to do was hop to the rhythm and soak it all in.

The awakening was not a sunrise; it was a cold chemical slap.

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Anges opened her eyes to a peeling grey ceiling turned yellow with tobacco smoke, like dead skin peeling from the flesh of the decayed. The room was large with the high, ornate ceilings of a grand Edinburgh townhouse, but the elegance stopped there. The air was a stagnant soup of stale beer, burnt sugar and a rancid acrid smoke that made her throat seize.

She sat up head throbbing from last night's wine, she cast her eyes over the "vibrant souls" from the night before strewn over the floor like discarded rags. Brain lay slumped against the radiator. His sketchbook lay torn, drowned in spilled spirits. He was no longer the mysterious lost prophet sketching lost souls in the park, instead he was a hollowed-out man in a cracked-out stupor, his mouth lay agape in the silent scream of sleep.

The beautiful melody of last night had been replaced by the hum of an old refrigerator and the wet, unrelenting cough of the gentleman next door.

The light was gone, extinguished by the very things that used to ignite it.

Agnes stood up legs trembling, as she navigated the minefield of crushed cans and soiled blankets, she looked out the window at the grand Victorian streets of the New Town. Beautiful, steeped in magic and history. A far truth from what lay behind the grand wooden doors and wooden sash windows: Ironic almost.

A wave of genuine longing hit her that morning. She missed the genuine smell of the honest sea, the safety of the grey. She slipped from the door leaving the chemical haze in her wake. Agnes strode toward the bus station with purpose, the cold morning air refreshing every discovery that was made on this ill-thought-out adventure.

Agnes knew she would return then to Pittenweem, she would gut the fish, and she would scrub the salt crust from the window's every Sunday. She would always be the girl from the small town. But as Agnes glanced over at the castle for one last time, she knew that she would never be trapped. She held the vibrant streets of Edinburgh close to her heart for many years after, however she understood now. The light behind one's eyes is usually a hollow soul reflecting what is in your own.