

The Injecting Capital of Europe

by Lisette Abrahams

I leave my babies and fly north, my bag packed with notes and a thick coat. They say that there, the cold gets in your bones.

Reaching arrivals, I wheel my little case outside where fat taxis wait, exhausts smoking. A driver lowers his window.

‘Where to?’

‘The Marriott Hotel please’.

My voice sounds silly. Soft. The people here are as hard as the rain. But he nods, and I climb in.

From the backseat, I stare at his bullneck. His heavy arms rest on the wheel, the blurry blue of a Scotland flag fading on one forearm.

‘Long way from hame,’ he says.

‘Yes,’ I reply, my voice small.

‘What are ye doin’ here?’

‘Er, I’m at a conference.’

He catches my eye in the rearview mirror. *God, please don’t ask me anything else.* I wish he’d put the radio on, turn it up loud.

‘Are ye speakin’?’ he asks.

My face gets hot. Who am I to come here and tell them, who bear the scars? Heroin runs through the veins of this city like the Clyde.

‘Yes,’ I say.

‘On what?’

‘I’m presenting on how to prevent fatal overdose in injecting drug users’.

Silence. I stare out of the window as we cross the grey river towards the city.

Then: ‘Aye,’ he grunts. ‘You’re in the right place.’

I smile weakly.

It would be pushing this new understanding to tell him that actually, Edinburgh is the injecting capital of Europe, and that Glasgow gets a bad press. *Keep your know-it-all stuff to yourself, he doesn’t need telling.*

He pulls up sharply outside the hotel. *Glad to see the back of me*, I think.

Suddenly he is there, holding the taxi door open, handing me my case.

‘Nae charge hen,’ he says, his voice gruff. ‘Nae charge.’

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Author bio: Lisette writes poetry and short fiction. Her work has been shortlisted and longlisted in various writing competitions. She recently had a story shortlisted in the Oxford Flash Fiction Prize and achieved first place in the Fiction Factory Flash Fiction Competition 2024. Her work has appeared in several publications including the Kipling Journal, Reflex Fiction Volume 5, Drink and Drugs News, and the Oxford Flash Fiction Prize anthology. She currently works as a substance misuse practitioner in the NHS and lives in Surrey with her husband and sons, as well as her cats, Betty and Gilbert.