

that have collected on the black asphalt. Clutching a leather briefcase in one hand and a cigarette in the other, a figure in a long beige raincoat steps forward. He extinguishes his cigarette on the kerb. *Spigot mounted wheels.* The pneumatic hiss of the doors as they open, engulfing them in dry, musty air, bathing them in a warm glow of tungsten light. *Exact fare please.* The successive clinking of coins in the machine. The ticket printer whirrs.

– Two singles, please.

The voice confrontational, harsh; eye contact evasive. The two climb the stairs to the upper deck.

Foggy, steamed up windows. A pack of teenagers holds the rear. Tracksuits and designer labels. Golden hoops and sovereign rings glisten dully under the sterile glare of fluorescent lights. Urchins, raddges: rebels without a cause. Brows furrowed, their menacing stares intent on conjuring provocation. The two emerge from the staircase. Their eyes click. Curses echo round the empty chamber. Laughter: the snarls of hungry jackals, hyenas hunting in packs. Like schemie centaurs, lusting on violence, the group lie in wait. Older, unintimidated the two take their seats. The war cries fall on deaf ears and the vessel moves off into the night, making its way stealthily along raindrenched streets, out towards the suburbs, on past

*streets leading to dark alleys and damp closes
resplendent cobbles that glisten in the rain
tall gothic spires carved from stone
couples who take shelter huddled under umbrellas
doors that open into snug bars with smells of beer and wet wool
stone tenements four floors high
the son of an Alloa shipman winking atop his watchtower
men in white aprons stirring vats of sticky bittersweet brew
a canal a gang of drunken kids swigging cider beneath a railway line
tower blocks that grow to dominate the skyline
bleak city schemes draw near
bodies lie slumped in piss-soaked stairs
minds lie sunk in a fog of inertia and lost dreams
bruised purple limbs
burnt matches
syringes
screams*