

in the ink dark

*These are some words to wander with
as part of In the Ink Dark a new project
from Luke Pell and collaborators*

**SIMONE KENYON, A SEA VIEW
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PODCAST 1 TRANSCRIPT

“ I’ve recently moved to Newhaven, which means I now see the estuary from my flat. I’ve heard it described as the sheltered arm of the North Sea. If you stand at the door of the living room, its window is full of the water and sky. Almost as though you could be living on a boat, which I had done for many years before. This view of water is something I’ve grown accustomed to. It felt like a good transition for moving onto dry land permanently.

The room is mostly whites and blues in the walls and furniture, an extension of tones from the outside. It has similar dimensions to the boat and the blue sofa and chairs have come with us, but the window seat is the new addition. This is where I’m sitting mostly these days, looking out.

You can see this view from multiple vantage points around here if you take a walk or sit for rest at the various harbors. Looking over the Firth of Forth to Fife, (i like the way that sounds, the Firth of Forth to Fife); you can watch the shades of blues and greys changing on a daily basis, the movement of cloud formations, the sky reflecting back from the water is an endless source of study.

On particular days when the light is reflecting just right, I see the depths of the mountains in the distance to the west past the Forth bridge. At dusk the light often brings those hills more vivid and closer to view. The sunsets always bring new depth and details to this panorama. I feel lucky to be here. These blues extend to the mountains further north, illustrating the depths of these hills through the gradients of colour described by the writer Rebecca Solnit in her book, A Field Guide to getting Lost.

I want to read you something from it, she can explain things better than I can. Have a sit down if you like or just take a moment to look at your immediate horizon whilst I read,

“The world is blue at its edges and in its depths. This blue is the light that got lost. Light at the blue end of the spectrum does not travel the whole distance from the sun to us. It disperses among the molecules of the air, it scatters in water. Water is colorless, shallow water appears to be the color of whatever lies underneath it, but deep water is full of this scattered light, the purer the water the deeper the blue. The sky is blue for the same reason, but the blue at the horizon, the blue of land that seems to be dissolving into the sky, is a deeper, dreamier, melancholy blue, the blue at the farthest reaches of the places where you see for miles, the blue of distance. This light that does not touch us, does not travel the whole distance, the light that gets lost, gives us the beauty of the world, so much of which is in the color blue.

Solnit. R”

On my fireplace is an object that is already broken but remains precious to me. It seems at home here because it's a small paper sailing ship in a large light bulb. Not a ship in a bottle, but a ship, sailing on a choppy sea of blue goo in the centre of a large light bulb that came from a larger ship. My father made this ship in a bulb many years ago whilst sailing in the middle of the ocean somewhere. I imagine it was to pass some of the many hours, day and weeks away at sea. He also had a ship tattooed on his forearm, another form of distraction whilst at sea I imagine.

What draws people to the sea and water? To be in, on or nearby it? Do most people feel drawn to bodies of water? Would you say you feel a sense of affinity with the sea? What does it hold that feels so unfathomable?

Once when working on a project about water we began by thinking about it through this DH Lawrence quote:

“Water is H₂O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one,
but there is also a third thing, that makes it water
and nobody knows what it is”.

I've carried this quote in my head for a number of years as it seems to reassure me about not having an answer to everything, some things are just unknown or unfathomable and the sea and large bodies of water have something of this feeling for me. They have a different kind of memory or knowing.

Often people walk near or in line with the water, seek it out, follow the built defenses and walls that protect the land, head to the headlands. Walking around this area becomes more familiar, I follow the paths around the edges, get a sense of its borders, I keep looking out.

Here there is huge industrial working ships docked up close by to the ships that become museum pieces, large cargo boats towering next to the petrol station I visit. The scale of things change in Leith and Newhaven, cargo ships, cruise ships, ferries and dredgers all so everyday yet a reminder of our connection to the waters and the immensity of industry that still goes on here. This industrial-ness brings about an intangible sense of remembering for me, connecting to my fathers past. At least that's what I project onto the landscape if you catch me in a particular mood.

My father worked in the merchant navy as a young lad and then as a seasonal fisherman in Scotland. It was always a source of imagining and romanticizing about his adventures when I was younger.

A few years ago I was sitting looking out to sea early one morning on a visit to Knoydart on the west coast of Scotland, watching a tiny fishing vessel appear and almost disappear again under the swell of waves, I thought about what a dangerous job it is. Perhaps those who are accustomed to such challenges don't see it as such a terrifying prospect, but in that moment of watching that vessel, I saw the human fragility against such a volume of water.

I looked further down the inlets and coastline of this western side and realized I was looking in the direction towards the Isle of Mull. I had found out the year before that my father's ashes had been scattered there by his best friend, a scuba diving enthusiast. For reasons unknown to me he scattered my dad's ashes on the sea and over the shipwreck of an old coal boat that had sunk in the Sound of Mull in a storm.

A few years ago I visited this place for the first time. We took a small boat out to this place on the sea. We turned the engine off when reaching the bright orange buoy that marks the spot of the wreck below. The water was dark blue, no light penetrating through the hidden depths. What metaphors it conjures up as I speak about it now!

Floating on the water that day marked this meeting place of reflecting on a year when I became older than my father in years. Floating there on the surface, with a ship- wreck below us, imagining dad's ashes taking off on the strong winds down the Sound, forever blowing in the wind.

I realize that there will always be things unknown to me in relation to his death and my grief. I wonder how much is true and how much is fictional about my father, what do I really know apart from the feelings I encounter?

The buoy provided an anchor with which I could usefully take myself to; a place to reflect and celebrate his life, for the first time in over 20 years. A buoy bobbing in the water marks the place of a catastrophe for the coal ship and my fathers' decision to take his own life.

The melancholy of that grief like the mountains and lights and distance and time appear to fade one day and then seem so close and vivid the next. Nothing is constant in the years of losing someone. We ebb and flow along with the world and the water.

Death is unfathomable, hard to measure for most, especially when it's a sudden loss and at an early age. Its been years now of swimming through it. The sea is a gigantic volume in which to connect to a memory of a person and the planet I want to understand. When I look out to sea, or large bodies of water I am looking for an understanding of life ultimately. Or perhaps a reminder that life does continue on.

Now I have the water and sky, not just as a view but almost as part of the room. It is invited in like a family member sitting together admiring the sunset. The brighter days bring a vivid orange line across the water and into the window. A direct line to those far distant hills that the sun begins to dip behind. The room changes colour, everything glows. For those brief moments and if you sit on the right side of the window seat you can bathe in the light. These moments allow for the hopefulness of being here, just by looking out in the sheltered arm of the North Sea. ”