

CHRISTINA COLLINS

Chinn to Haunch

The real veins of this urban place
Are not grey roads all tarmac smothered:
Alcester, Chamberlain, Brandwood End –
Dead nouns of destination –
But these green slivers. They thread
Quietly between car parks and garden fences,
Sliding past Lidl, lockups, and garages,
And reach out to touch fingertips.

I pick my route to your house
From the façade of sycamore; pillared
Entrance to the Stratford canal.
I follow the pin thread bluetit call
Beside the Horseshoe's graffiti; its sharp stench
Where water holds the sky in smooth laps
An industrial slicing given back.
Narrowboats know these hidden lines
Of cold brown stories and harvest finds.
The Chinn brook watches, face resting on its palm,
Softly rolling to the squatting Haunch
Where you live.

At the bridge arch I turn from cut to brook,
That runs like a thread of spit
Along the triangle's subterranean cowslip.
I follow bare hawthorn where,
On a hot summer twilight,
We watched an owl dive,
Following its silent path
Above our spellbound heads.

At the stony crossroad, I turn away
From the roar of Yardley's ghost wood
Past the silver birch stand.
I navigate by berries, by frost,
By a robin who always waits
And cross the oak-tethered Chinn,
Stinking of Daz whites and grey water
Where we met and gathered cobs.

Leaving Chinn, I broach the Haunch,
Walking the nave of young ash
Fingers waving – signing semaphores,
Ford the tarmac betrayal of the only road, and re-link
To green nerves, centrally thinking
of loam and roots, hard mud,
The thin trickle feeding fecund promise.

The woods open to Billesley, spreading
Its common arms around standing stones of tower blocks,
To collect its green ribbons.
Willow furs; white glossy buds like mice pups
In tunnels framing the pondweed shallows
Where in spring I told your children
To watch out for Jenny Greenteeth.

Two brooks mingle, like sisters, like us.
These paths fill their function to connect,
Linking you and me across twenty-three
Minutes of walking where these veins
Hold the green blood of our city.