

GIVE WAY FOR HOME WORK

I Want You Back

She'd never run across the road before that day, or jumped the wall. We didn't recognize her straightaway because she rarely left the house. On the day that she did, she was lucky. Someone saw her go and called out 'Is that your cat, is that your cat?' A young boy's voice, high, insistent climbing over the sound of the talking women. "Just ran across the road and under the fence." The boy got up from the step, and so did the cat's owner who lived in one of the flats on the corner plot. They looked over the wall, then opened the gate and called the cat. The cat was gone. As old as she was she had picked her self up and crossed the road. 'Your white cat Angel,' said the boy 'I saw her go'. I saw her go too. White, clever looking, low to the ground, blue eyes, surprisingly fast, maybe slightly blind. Definitely old.

One by one, everyone got up, off steps, deck chairs and walls where they were distantly gathered, to followed the boy, the gardener, and her dog to look for Angel the cat. The tea party was now a search party. They crossed the street through the dust of passing traffic to the fence, surrounding a row of the derelict houses on the other side.

"Might have have smelled a rat" said the woman from over the road. The cat's owner shook her head tutted, and knelt to call under the fence. "She's a good ratter." Calling louder now. "Angel Angel"

The rats had the run of the building site, which had fallen still for Covid. The rats, not furloughed were breeding. Also surprisingly fast.

For a single moment it was quiet. This was one of the few streets in the city that had seen traffic, double, and double and double again during the first lockdown. It was boom-time-zoom-time for vehicles on Kelvin Grove. Across the city and apparently worldwide motor journeys had dropped away and a silence had grown

in it's place. Bird song and arguments could be heard, and sirens. But not here. Here in this street traffic had increased dramatically. It's sounded night and day barreling down the terrace, lifting dust, billowing pigeon feathers, and making people blink and cough. By day it was solid stopping, they starting, they roaring engines. By night it was the same seeming faster and more urgent. A local diversion had transformed the traffic, and the quiet street had become a substitute for a wide tree lined four lane Boulevard.

There were foot passengers too. Families going to the park, talking and laughing, passing the occupied sunny side of the street, where little dogs barked from behind snuffled curtains, or walking on the and the shady side of the street, derelict scaffolded up, strewn with dead pigeons and dusted with dry earth from the dormant diggers. All furloughed for the duration.

A group of neighbors met here daily, at a respectable enough distance for a cup of tea and a chat. At half four every day, a first floor sash window rattled open, and a tune blasted out, fresh from the internet, as an invitation to meet. The Scotswoman in the top flat of the corner house called it our Call To Prayer. It had been her idea, borrowed from the radio, told in Todmorden. It was embraced by the neighbours here when she suggested we try it too.

Kelvin Grove was the first of the nine Welsh Streets to be threatened with demolition and then reprieved over a 16 year period. Having campaigned and survived residents were old hands at grouping together. So aside from Bank Holidays, and a few days when kids got sick, transport didn't work or shop queues defeated the plan out every single day a squeaky bay window groaned open, and music blasted out. Anyone who wanted to see a human face, (at a 2m distance) could put the kettle on and get ready for the Four-Thirteastreet meet. The music occasionally ran to two tunes played loudly, and often badly from a speaker balanced on the windowsill by the woman over the road. She took requests or played whatever came into her head at the time. This included Sesame Street, to Islands in The Stream and everything in between. The tune

that day was 'Sunshine Day' and Osibisa had the neighbours dancing by the time the tea was brewed. Four-Thirtea continued into the evening on warm days like this, the day the cat ran off.

"I bet the cat could smell the rats I yelled from inside the fence, rattling the gate of the locked front yard the cat had allegedly entered. They follow the pigeons in to the empty houses, looking for eggs eating their dead." But no one answered because no one was there. Everyone, all the women, the boy, and the little dog had split up and spread out calling out the cat's name. "Angel! Angel! come on Angel" came from everywhere as the neighbors ran around the backs of the empty houses and scattered around the building site.

Doors were knocked and the search party grew, the site security were recruited and banged on the hoardings. More dogs and boys on bikes pitched in and then just like that she was found, lured with Dreamies scooped, petted and carried off home, and it was over. The search party emerged like ghosts of residents past from the dark building site, a place of emptiness that reeled in cats with the smell of rats and sometimes didn't return them. People were good-nighting and going home when the woman from over the road skidded on something. The dew was falling and the light was gone. She bent down pulled a steel sheet from the wet grass. DIVERSION it said on the back – well the front when she turned it over. It was cold in her hands. She carried it home where she slipped it under the fence of the empty house next door, following in the cat's footsteps. And like the cat it seemed to disappear too. The next day, the importance of road signs were came up in conversation when the neighbours met again for tea. Because the day after Angel went missing, a fracas between drivers lead to a challenge on the rat run that our street had become.

You Better Go Now

It was the fourth week of lockdown, the fourth week without rain. Car pelted down the narrow road, lifting dust from the building site. The rush hour traffic far exceeded pre-lockdown levels as vehicles were forced to use our narrow street in while the adjacent tree lined Princes Avenue, was empty of cars. Furloughed whilst it was resurfaced this dual carriageway was usually a wall of traffic that dominated the space. And that is how it travelled our street. It dominated. More cars than the single lane terraced street could hold idled in South and High Park Streets awaiting their chance to move, petrol fuming, and sharp braking. Less than a minute's wait ticking away agglomerated into acceleration anger. Foot down, revved up, and scowling past for all the world as if this was the wide fast multi-lane avenue that was blocked off for the road works. Foot passengers dodged the vehicles, as well as each other, seeking space to remain apart between the parked cars, ambulances, food couriers, postmen, and weed dealers on their pusher bikes. The road can hold some traffic but not the volume bowling towards it – and not if it all wants to move at once.

The pavements were chokka too on sunny days. The area emptied itself out into the park for a shake, families, doubles, singles and triples out for The Daily Exercise. They arrived from all directions, with shopping, scooters, bikes, balls, buggies, dogs and each other in hand. The parade of recreational possibilities was like a pop-up for maxing premium positive benefits from the seat of the pandemic. The sun was warm, it was a month into lockdown, the new normal was staring the old normal out.

Around a dozen tea drinkers were on their steps, forecourts and between parked cars doing the social distance sidestep. Cars in slow moving in stop-start queues ground along the narrow roadway just a couple of metres away from the gathering, which on this sunny Thursday, spread from number 21 to number 39 on the sunny side of the street. It was hot. Sprits were high – a living life to the full crackle was in the air, fueled by the daily counting of Covid dead on the news. Teacups had given way to glasses. Not everything was giving way though. Every

so often, a knot in the string of cars formed when someone refused absolutely to stop, or reverse for another driver. The strategies used to take road space and force forwards was a horn-blowing, engine revving, mouthing off marathon. So far someone always eventually backed down. It had been like it for weeks, drivers hitting horns shaking fists, shouting and swearing, getting out, slamming doors banging on glass and shouting. Once a loyal female passenger was reported to have screamed a stream of 'Go Back Go back' out of the passenger window, Tammy Wynettingly sitting by her man, but mostly it was men watched and tooted at by the building queues of traffic. Walkers on the pavements, and a growing audience of neighbours together (but apart) on the forecourts and steps of the terrace, looking out of windows and doorways were aghast at all the noise... all the effing and jeffing. 2m metres is quite far apart when it's person to person, but 2m apart is too close for comfort when dealing with tin-box dick-graters in their 4x4 braggin wagons.

On day 24 of lockdown a black cab trundled down the sunny side of the street from High Park Street. There were parked cars on his side of the road preventing him from pulling over to let an approaching vehicle pass. So he drove on. A Vauxhall Estate car accelerated along the shady side of the street, where few cars had parked. The driver had enough space to pull in and wait for the cab to pass, but he didn't have the patience. He also carried on too, and on, and on as did the cab halting only when they were bumper to bumper. This blocked all other traffic from entering or leaving the street. Five thirty on a Thursday afternoon.

Everything stopped, the two cars stopped, the conversation stopped, all the traffic stopped and the pedestrians stopped. Then it started, the horns sounded, the shouting started, windows rolled down, hands flew out, both drivers oblivious to other road users who or the dismayed on-lookers. You couldn't hear what they were saying because they were shouting into each other's mouths, but we made a guess they both thought that the other driver should reverse. Cars were backed

up to the end of Kelvin Grove, down South Street and onto Devonshire in one direction, and onto High Park Street in the other. Some of them did a bit of horn tooting and yelling too. Car horns and yelling echoed between the houses. "Blockdown for lockdown" I said mostly to myself. "Not exactly social distancing are they", offered a neighbor who's was alert to these things even before being alert was the thing to be. It looked like someone might definitely catch something nasty although to be fair both drivers lung capacity was not in question. The tea drinkers were gob smacked, open mouthed, shaking their heads and hands on their hiping. They called out a caution to the women from over the road who ran out of patience, stepped into the fray and banged on the taxi drivers window. The last thing she heard was "Don't get involved" as she turned her phone camera on and took to the road

"Mate come on - move on, take this elsewhere, people live here, these are our homes"

Neither driver seemed to notice.

"GET OUT OF OUR STREET! "

She shouted in a frankly disappointing tone of voice, too high pitched, and squally to cut through the rest of the shouting horn blowing and engine revving that filled up the space. Still the drivers stopped shouting momentarily, as the men both in their fifties, took in the challenge, and then carried on as if nothing had happened. But the driver of the Vauxhall Estate had been recognized as the man who used to sell pancakes on the market.

"Ad is that you? Ad mate we live here, stop your nonsense and get out of our street! Get out of our street" This loud enough for everyone to hear.

The watching crowd buoyed by the fact we were suddenly on first name terms called out with one sing-songy-angry-pants voice...

GET OUT OF OUR STREET!
GET OUT OF OUR STREET!

GET OUT OF OUR STREET!

GET OUT OF OUR STREET!

As the wall of shouty-chanting pushed forward, the woman from over the road pulled back to the pavement re-joined her friends and her voice melted into the one voice, the continued unbroken chorus increasing in volume.

United by the common foe, the drivers, stopped shouting, shaking their fists and jabbing fingers at each other, shook hands and drove away. Just like that, social distance or no. The tooting honking vehicles backed up behind them, horned their way into the space and accelerated their anger away. Then they all blew right off in a territorial dust storm. It's like we needed a diversion.

Nina Edge May 2020

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Background Note

Four-Thirtea is a daily gathering organized by neighbours in Kelvin Grove at the edge of The Welsh Streets in Liverpool. A couple of women wanted to ensure face to face contact and social support through lockdown so made a daily commitment to create a daily point of contact, adapted to social distancing rules until the period of lockdown ends. daily gathering on the steps and forecourts of Kelvin Grove is there for people from other streets if they need it. It began on the 12th day of lockdown, and has run for 48 days.