

Proud Geordie

One bridge tilts
And one bridge swings
As the quayside market sellers lay their tables thick
With vinyl records, mosaic mirrors and flowers.
Hannah's treating her partner to dinner tonight.
She haggles with a greengrocer, her left hand poised over a tub of tomatoes
Stroking their dog, Hamish, with her right.

And at the front of a metro, canary yellow, crossing overhead
Sits Jess, en route to Tynemouth Surf Café
To meet a girl who likes three sugars in her latté
Whose Tinder bio said she was 'pretty and witty and gay'.
A little further up the coast
Alexis, from Syria, celebrates his first year of living here
By making his housemates traditional kibbeh and shawarma
Followed by cups of tea and toast.

From Spanish City to Chinatown,
And the white foam waves along the shore at Bamburgh
From the top of Grey's Monument with views for miles around,
Proud Geordies are found.

Jay buys a ticket from Huddersfield to the Toon
To march the streets with Northern Pride.
The city thrums in his ears - the energy, the heat of the bodies, the laughter,
The bounce in their stride.
And the boy who said he would meet him in the bar beside Tyneside Cinema
Never shows, but he doesn't mind.
As he walks back through the darkened streets to central station
He knows he could call this place home.

Juli met Jamie in his Doc Marten boots at the Mayfair on rock night,
In the lazy hot summer of 1993.
He lived in a squat in Fenham
With a girl whose hair was long and her voice was husky.
The names of nightclubs roll off Julie's Mackem tongue:
The Barking Dog, Rockshots, Powerhouse, Switch
Recalling how she stood out with her long hair and makeup.
Remembering the space that her identity took up.
And at her bi support group she finds the words and the confidence to be who she is
Meeting others like her, like Lesley and Pam,
Who fell in love the night

David Bowie played to the crowds at Roker Park.
And walked home singing *ch-ch-ch-ch changes* in the dark.

From the football fans who bring tins for the food bank
To the cows on the Moor who are the first to hear us score.
Whether lesbian, bisexual, trans or queer
Proud Geordies are here.

And hanging on a tree inside a Tyneside flat in Blaydon
Is a bauble that reads 'Merlin's first Christmas'
This year, for Merlin, authentically living
Will be better than anything he could give or be given.
Meanwhile, Hattie's rehearsing her drag cabaret
And Abdul's working a 12 hour shift at the RVI
Meanwhile, Claire and Safiya climb Penshaw Monument
And smile when another same sex couple pass them by
And George is on his way back to Peterlee
To tell his parents he's met the most wonderful man this side of the North Sea.

You see, the North East isn't perfect
It's not easy to grow up anywhere as a square peg in a world that wishes you round
But on the cobbled streets of Durham
And the star lit paths of Kielder Forest
Proud Geordies are found.

And what about me? Well.
It's been almost ten years since I boarded an East Coast train
To join the crowds of students on Richardson Road.
And now I call this little corner of the North my home.
And I walk the country paths where wildflowers grow.
And when it comes to my identity
If you never asked, you'd never know.

But pride isn't defined by the person you're dating
It's not an outfit you put on every so often
Misshapen and strange, it's just who you are
Whether you're building flat pack furniture with your wife, or your husband,
Or catching eyes with a stranger in a Newcastle bar.

From the suffragette statue in Morpeth
To the sun going down on Heaton Park
I climb up to the bandstand and declare
To thy own self be true:
I'm a Proud Geordie, too.