

2nd equal prize, poetry

Tomography

By David Cairns

A documentary filmmaker, David Cairns grew up in Edinburgh and now lives in London, making frequent walking trips in the Highlands.



They woke me at night and slid me,
skull raw from the crunch of stone,
sticky-fingered with brownish blood,
into a hollow, beige machine.

Ringed by a living stream
of taxis and stumbling drunks,
the hospital span round me,
flat on my back in the scanner.

Unseen in a near white chamber
someone leafed through my brain,
opened it up like an atlas,
traced its contours with a finger.

A mountain was charted there,
as I thought how you pick your way,
watching the shifting clouds,
wondering when to turn back,

looking ahead for the track,
chest alive with the climb,
while always beside you the burn
unfolds, small and pure.

With each step the paths are fewer.
Then the bright moss at the source
fades into bare summit rocks
and you've no more choices to make.

Raised by a silent lift I lay,
eating toast in a high ward,
while the dawn spread out the roofs,
a golden map of the city below.