



# James Clelland

## NOVELS

### Those Streets

He sank unsteadily onto the park bench, his tattered coat making him look like an actor playing the role of a tramp, the opposite of a real person. In the fading light, he examined the little tub in his hand with satisfaction. Ah, good old Seafield: his trusty summer refuge. He knew how to find food and shelter here, the simple needs of a man on the road.

A strange place, this Seafield: part holiday town, part old age home. It had grown up around a field called the Low Green that faced the slate grey Irish Sea, which opened, beyond a couple of islands, into the Atlantic. Gradually, rich and poor suburbs had extended inland, rigidly segregated by the curving line of the river that ran towards the greasy slab of sea.

Summer here was a time of plenty – of bins overflowing with the discards of careless holidaymakers and restaurant slops. He tried to stay within reach of the eating places and the tourists to the south of the river, the richer part, far from the dangers on the north side. But today his hunger had driven him to the north.

The few people who glanced his way saw only a tramp. What did they know of his past and his journey? He had once been important, very important in the eyes of many, and had known success and failure, crime and punishment. He had paid for his weaknesses and failures and was now important to the only significant person, and that was himself. He was at peace with that, unlike the mindless human herds he had to live amongst, most of whom stared right through him. He was happy now to be invisible to them.

Slowly he peeled back the foil top of the yoghurt tub. It opened with a slight pop. Not too old. He sniffed deeply, to prolong the anticipation, to raise his hopes. Then he stuck his tongue inside. It tingled slightly with the sharpness of recent fermentation. He held his tongue there a moment to savour that tingle, barely aware of the small gang of boys approaching from the shadows.