

Two Poems: 'Cousins', 'Teenage Testament'

Ian C Smith

Cousins

Dirty side-panelled windows, acid-etched,
a wide entrance with cracked mosaic tiles
suggesting past elegance, seemed far-fetched
after slogging Liverpool's streets for miles,
a Down Under dream, searching for lost kin.
My rebellious aunt's son lent me his room
post-pub crawl, my hot head in a scouse spin.
The hallway stretched from loneliness to doom,
a wan naked light bulb hung from a wire.
Seeing no-one, I heard keys scrape in locks,
saw his plastic flowers jarred, cold ash fire,
thoughts of cherished hope when leaving the docks.
Daybreak, sparrows mounting in guttering,
taps behind those closed doors, soft muttering.

Teenage Testament

Thirteen

In trouble, school, home, we almost made the state border. A light in gathering gloom flashing on the squad car's roof ended our flight. We claimed our carton of *Camels* was legit, exchanged for food with homeless men, an edited inversion of the truth, cop looking sadly bemused. The only place available for us to sleep, door unlocked, smelled of ancient stone, walls a vulgar archive of misspelled rage. The cop's wife, motherly, served eggs, tea, for breakfast before we were entrained back.

Fourteen

A collie stray, that slender nose, luxurious coat, sad, knowing eyes, made overtures, a pick-up. Alert, maintaining its distance behind on the footpath, it dogged me walking home after work. Tired, undernourished, I swore later I offered no encouragement. Uncertain about gender, my landlady's garden filled with dog, I called it Laddie. Her clothesline offcut replaced my shoelaces for its lead, the landlady warning me a boy-with-dog visit via train might end badly.

Sixteen

Poor, lustful, on wheels, some stolen, we took any chance to cruise beyond our ghetto for crime or romance we called Scoring, tattooed, t-shirts tight. The junior, so in the back, I spotted two girls. We braked, they got in, I got lucky. A rathe beauty in my lap, the girl-less driver agog, his illiterate mate up front too slow for logistics. Thus, stunned by luck, an abstract explanation for the absence of forethought used by street rats the way God is attributed by the devout, I transitioned to carnal sweetness.

Fourteen

In the guard's van's sway and windy rush, smells of oil and dust, old sunlight, he laughed, repeating the dog's name, accepting my offer of a smoke, me bullshitting like the lamplit station ads. Then the bus shelter's varnished light, the waiting car, that face my mother said was carved from granite. A whole weekend. In the dark chambers of my imagination I hoped a dog might soften a heart of stone.

Seventeen

My tarnished angel said she chose me in one glance, hot thighs wrapping my ribs in my rented room, one way to beat back the seething past, to forget. Her friend shared a mattress under my high rattling brass bed, my back seat mate in her arms.

Coda

Google Earth transports me in vivid close-up. Our idyll, neighbourhood roofline updated with skylights. I gaze longingly on the past, their window yellowed, shadowy, an old story. She straddles the boy, charm necklace jumping for joy, holds it in her mouth, bites down in rapture.

Author Bio

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *Communion*, *Cordite*, *Eureka Street*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, & *Shaping the Fractured Self* (UWAP). His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press (2015).