Motorcycle on my mind

Ian C Smith

The ghost of my young self dwells a boy’s bike ride from a city friend’s new townhouse. When she leaves for work I pat pockets, lock her door, set out on foot. Passing the old swimming pool things gone but not forgotten float to the surface. I know I shall head for the high goods rail trestle bridge, its slow trains rackety echoes, a punishing review of the past.

My newspaper delivery grid, musty archives of my mind zinging. A black dog, hackles alert, snarled through a closed gate here at scratch of day inches from my bare legs each time I stopped. The house looks different, as do many, but street names evoke the oh so long ago. Around the corner lived a boy who became a writer of mesmeric Australian landscape fiction. I shall walk this locale for years today, aching.

Disoriented, memory no longer shatterproof, I rest near a sculpted driveway of coloured concrete, trying to reconfigure the past on this landscape. Realisation erupts, raising the veil of progress to reveal the heady odour of hard-scrabble before these updated houses, this permed parkland, changed the view from scruffy to confusing. My girlfriend lived so close I am almost there. Her single mother fed me home-made cake, ruffled my hair.

With schoolmates I pedalled to the bridge glimpsed in the distance, spectral, unused now, hauled to its height bald tyres dumped below, let them go as if dropping boiling pitch from a castle’s ramparts to plummet through a golden morning, swishing howls those of wild raiders scalded, delighting us before they bounced, dandelion fluff dancing on air, each bound quicker, less pronounced.

To impress that girlfriend I borrowed her big brother’s Norton 500cc, a machine like Che Guevara rode, hot hands clasping my chest, breasts pressed against my back, blazing into a stun of wind towards the city that looms closer now, a dreamscape then. Because she was three years older than me I strained to appear cool, but was barely shaving. Eventually her womanly appetites scared me off, our break-up pathetic, another cliché of careless youth, into time’s drift, the tunnel of my story where I thought I had left her behind.

Author Bio

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