

Being Frightened

By John Egan

You said I'm commanding,
even sinister –
my glasses, my uniform, my stare.

And then you said
you really loved
being frightened a little.

I thought being frightened
by someone you know and trust
is such delicious fantasy

but being frightened
by someone you don't know
or don't trust,

well,
that's just real life,
isn't it?

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A. Cooke. 30.12.22. A Police Mug shot

By John Egan

Alice Adeline Cooke, were you twenty then?
Why were you arrested – what crime
near the end of that forgotten year, a city
we'd hardly recognize or understand.
What did they charge you with? Theft?
Prostitution? No – your shirt's too workaday for that.
Murder? You look too calm, too normal
but if murder, who did you kill? And why?

You don't look hardened but I could be wrong.
An ordinary face I've often seen on trains
or in the street, not beautiful but there's no sign
of evil, no deformity or ugliness.

Your glance is frank, direct towards the camera,
forthright, curious though vaguely masculine.
Untidy hair tied-back in a messy kind of part.
A firm-set mouth, serious determined jaw.
You're facing prison. How long did they lock you away?

It's a face unmarked, unlined except the eyes –
large, unblinking, though one seems slightly wider
than the other, as if something's not quite right,
but then you'd hardly notice that
in the concentrated blaze of stare,
as if there's some overwhelming question
you were asked then, that must be answered now.

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Downstream

By John Egan

Our ferry's wake like moon shadow
tumbles away in silver, dances
in turmoil, churns and dazzles
in the rays of the yellow sun.
Symmetrical and parallel,
waves cascade towards each lush
and sliding bank, as if to mark
with a wet commotion, our slow passage.
Behind, the river's glittered reach
narrows to an afternoon's confusion
of sun and land and indistinct.

Ahead, a spreading blue and grey,
the channel marked with beacons, green
and red, that opens up before us
a wider river - precise bays
and sweeping bends, the wind that hums
in from the sea, the great, grey bridge
delicate on its narrow piers,
a thin gate of concrete and flight. Beyond
the silent mangroves, a port of silos
and gantries, reduced and scattered
like untidy children's tiny toys.

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Leaving the Cinema

By John Egan

Its no-man's land, shell-cratered with the shock
of having left but not arrived, borders
unclaimed like the wounded and the dead
who can't be heard and can't be found.
There's disbelief before you own the light,
adjust from two dimensions into flesh,
poor buggered reality, touch your life
again, stare and blink – leave the theatre dazed.

A film of murder, mystery and ghosts,
the foyer lights are merciless on tatt,
a lonely mansion on the Spanish coast
and then Toyotas queued in Norton Street.
Its waking from a dream or out of love
that shrinks bright worlds to diagrams in black.

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Walking to Newtown

By John Egan

The long lonely down Wilson Street,
mellow brick and walls
that shoulder the shambles away
and carriage sheds, artifacts
of steam and manufacture,
industrial construction that rides
like a cathedral in the Romanesque
above the piles of rubble,
among a wasteland of tin.
Rows of terrace houses
like reconfigured molars
in the gentle jaws
of Eveleigh and Darlington.

The brilliant green of plane trees
that billow in the wind
to second floors of wrought-iron
and a colour-chart of cars
that nose each other
like piglets in the street
or buzz like children's toys –
a glide and whirr
along the tree-lined afternoon -
a larger quality of gone
and fast dimensions
beyond the sound of breath –
my footfall repetition
of asphalt under shoes.

The direct route
to Newtown's shops and noise.
A coffee there and raisin toast,
though really there's no reason
for me to go –
I walk because I can,
because I like to walk
and keep on walking
now I'm here –
while here is comfortable and nice,
I'm traveling on to there,
that enigmatic somewhere else, the prize
that dances teasingly ahead

and once was here
but never is here now.

This warm and solitude,
this afternoon that slides itself to evening,
I walk the kilometers
in the minutes and the hours,
although occasionally the sense
that all those years could be,
silent, mellow, enormous,
slowly walking me.

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