

Extracts from *Miming Silence*, Bernadette Cremin

GROWING PAINS

Silence was
the lullaby you left
to keep Susan awake.

She wasted her teenage
hunting for the reason
in your record collection

she untangled Joy Division,
Two-Tone and Ska until
anorexia finally broke her.

She unstitched each lyric
gnawed every chorus and verse
punished herself like a thin dog

because you left her the red thing
that any glass shape can cut
out of a wrist and...

I hope you had time to panic properly
time to regret the mess you left
for your mother to find

time to watch your soft pulse
throb like love-sex into the warm bath
you drew like a Hollywood cliché.

I hope you had time to panic properly.

See now I just remember you
as the one with fat fingers
that Susan even bothered to kiss

another would-be local hero
that hungry girls fell in love with
until their periods started.

But I never will forget your dad
in my dad's chair drinking whiskey
asking me to write your eulogy

because I wrote poetry
and wouldn't let him down.
So it was for him alone

that I took a filthy drug at your funeral
so that I was capable to stand at the altar
to tell lies for your mother

to a too young congregation
that stood in their older brothers' suits
smart shoes and awkward black ties

casting their aimless prayers into the sky
while I begged God for a selfish frost
to chew the football pitch you ran across

every fucking Sunday.

SOLEMN

I am here to book fun, in eight months away.

Across the manic carpet
behind a restless desk
a plump 20-something
agitates PC keys.

I flick through magazines
of pristine everywhere's
I've never been
never met in an atlas
or at party chit-chat.

On page six —

A vanilla beach — a flesh circus
of six packs and unwrapped breasts
tassels of lean bikinis stretched and
tenderised by salt water simmer
under a pantomime sky.

On page nine —

a love-drunk couple sip chilled fizz
and beam at their symmetrical children
watching them chase melting ice cream
through fumbling fingers, past wrists
across palms and down arms

with giggling tongues.
In the distance a toned teenager
throws a rainbow beach ball
across a staple onto the next page
where his girlfriend waits on tiptoe.

Impossible colours spill through the brochure
into European cities where sophists graze
on newspapers at pavement cafés
and greedy tourists with spiteful cameras
bite lumps out of the architecture.

I continue browsing a world away
until a raincoat with a wet wife
coughs and I stop at page twenty eight
where a solemn mountain suffocates
under a mistake the snow has made.

SARAH'S HUSBAND

takes showers to confirm his masculinity.

He's pruned his time to exactly seven minutes having read an article in a Sunday supplement that concluded this to be the national average for a moderately active man of his age.

He insists on *Detol*, *Palmolive* and *Vosene* peppermint emulsion and apple-white tiles (she once joked that the walls matched the soap forgetting how threatening he still finds affection).

Every weekday he moles his lunch breaks away in a back street café where a flexible teenager with a pencil behind his ear clatters bangles and mumbles stormy songs.

He always orders *Mothers' Pride*, white bursting with any red meat and mayonnaise and trespasses the tabloid for tits at the table next to the fire exit

where he carved his initials on April 5th '76 with the fidgeting penknife the forensics found among the debris that the fire left in his older brother's flat.

THIS ROOM

If I sit at that angle
it's nearly comfortable

but I fail when
you decipher my smile

the crack it makes
across my face.

I am a tower of ash
in a sorry wind

when you hold me,
when we pretend

to be just friends
as we kiss cheeks

and I leave this room.
These corners, these stains

this wallpaper cage
that watched us

two cowards scared
of love out loud.

Where you shuffled me like music,
steered my strings with clever wrists

nursed me with white noise
and the thud of your pulse

and I utterly miss this room
when I am everywhere else

snared in some handsome gaze,
held too close by another shirt

a pattern that I don't understand.

TWOSOME

You mouth slowly
at me across company

then lick your lips
to seal our unfinished.

You know how to
pace me like a diet

where to hold me
when my dream fidgets.

You are sexier
than an angled mirror

when you dance with me
like an unseen disease

double knotting my strings
like a spiteful child

when you prowl around me
like the underwear

you misspell in texts
and I cherish this risk

our mistake is taking.