

# Tracy Robinson

## FUMBLING IN A NEW HEAVEN

You might find yourself in the north on these pages or you might find that it has all been said before. Where storms are slow to brew, then cyclones manoeuvre, but no law of nature can slow the dressed up circles of the car powered town. The party is neatly dressed and buttoned up but don't be shy — you're not the only one wilting under bellows of hot air — those conversations of passports and misdirected rain. Feel water sluice your armpits, pinch your stockings skin free. Try to polish your clumsy heat affected style. It is a different town — that's what draws us, but then we behave just the same.

Focus on a face, shiny, wet and moving towards you. It might be a mirage — but it is not shimmering, and then you see a set of straight white teeth, mouthing out the inevitable,

— And what brought *you* to this place?

We're all defectors and uninvited guests but tonight you feel like a ship's bosun forging anchors to go with the stock reply,

— Well the sun and the islands, not to mention the lifestyle.

But why always stick to the straighter line — that needs a full stop; if you want to travel extremities, there is another voice:

— I came for the work but the rot is beginning to set in and we're all decomposing right now, you know, like primordial leaf litter — that's what we are and have you ever had to paint a house in this climate, 'cos it's sun stripped then rain lashed? Up here houses are reptiles — every year they shed their painted skins and sometimes I think it's that sort of town — where skin peels and leaves are shed.

Find yourself alone now, reappraising your small talk. Blew it with the metaphor — it was a too cold-blooded thought! Find a familiar face too — one of your might-have-beens but you don't want probing of histories — much easier to wage war upon yourself. Besides it is no fun in this climate for blood tests, veins are too thin for that. But with a will of their own your eyes are meeting so try to find a drink instead. Say,

— Hi, 'bye — I'll catch you later (like in another lifetime), sure, sure, suuure.

Walk these rooms a hundred times — so much beer and wine you think you're in some new west. But on the map it's due north of Calcium, where people struggle out a living with cement. That's where your tombstone waits for the chisel — they're digging the penultimate mass grave. Have you thought of a suitable inscription ... to be continued? But all this dead talk — don't let it put you off your food. Here's *hors d'oeuvre* served at 33 degrees Calcium complete with a banana leaf. A kitchen is the place for invention so let's have a crowd around the plate. Picture, if you can, their heads together starting up small talk.

— You know, this is where we swam and played all those years ago. I mean across the road where the river bends.

— You grew up here, then? That must have been different.

— It was all sky, that's how I remember it. Filled up with hawks and kites diving down to pick up shiny things. I think *we're* like raptors around this plate of food.

— Speak for yourself — I'm no bird of prey. For your information I never go to church.

There's some more of that concrete — it even gets inside peoples' heads. Makes you want to show how you are equally set.

— Well, at the risk of boring you, us kids would march down to that silver water and claim as far as a juvenile eye could see. Things were simple then and I knew who was on my team. It's all different now but I have some souvenirs.

Funny how you can talk like a tourist when you've been here too long. Some parties go on forever like heaven in that song. But what sort of party is this without a passion play? You know the sort of comment that comes from looking through an empty bottle when you tilt it 180 degrees.

— Has anyone ever told you, you're fearfully unattractive? Did you really say that, or just mean to? I think you thought it was somebody else. Hyperventilating now, in your role as reckless guest, and there's that nagging sense of home would be best. Will you repair to the toilet and take deep breaths? Well, perhaps not deep but slow. Turn the brass handle — radiating hot handshakes but at least you don't have to join some serpentine queue like in real life. Here, the way is clear for you to park your arse on another concrete hole and focus on pictures blue-tacked to the wall.

Every step you take, every move you make, someone's watching you.

That's not paranoia but an initiative of the health department who, it must be said, don't have to walk floors in the night trying to get tired babies to bed. And underneath Leunig's sad little warrior wails,

Individuality is a secret we carry to the grave.

*That* could be the epitaph — there's really no more to be said. But why not show some spirit and make one final stand?

In which case, excuse me, I've *got* to get out of here. Can I get through? Don't forget the scotch — you'll need it when the darkness comes. Step over a slumped body — prod it with peep toed shoes — just to check for vital signs, any response to pain. Let your eye wander to the fuse box — over there on the side of the stumpy tailed house. Looks too benign and an immediate desire to cross wires comes to the fore. You have, anyway, a talent for such things. Hands are quivering — with excitement or fear? Come on, this is something you could do blind. You pull out the fuses — disappointed they won't explode. Love to detonate. Now there's no more noise or spotlight, no more charged up affair. Just another restless night in shadow. Hear the fruit bats squabble.