

## Behind Your Door

My brother has been living behind a door within my grandmother's house for over a decade. I wonder who he is now and I'm left with hints; shells of intoxication, hand-crushed, left in trails by the back door. And what once infused through the keyhole is now sealed over with gaffa – it's sealed him away, so that his own relations are strangers that he has never known.

Late at night I can hear his television and sometimes I can hear his own words permeate the walls of his fortress. Yes, he is alive. I have imagined the upward curl of his twenty-seven years, but I've not seen it in the flash between the front and the bedroom door. There is a little break in the weather, we have greeted one another, a 'hello' and sometimes beyond, but his words are precious and distraction is always the crafty winner.

From these dregs I have salvaged one snapshot that wanders about in my mind – there you stand at the threshold, hanging your head as you turn away and then surrender yourself to the exhausted realm that exists behind your door. It engulfs you once again and you return to it with an intimacy that is unworthy; that is rancid and desolate. And again the door slams behind you and again the air fills with the threat of nothingness. And again, and again. It is the pestilence upon my mother's heart.

Have you ever known love? You are no mirror of it. Where do you go at night, in your trench coat and boots? The darkness sweeps away your footsteps. What do you tell your friends? What stories are in your water-colours and charcoals? *Do you paint with colour at all?* I have asked myself 'why can't you tell me brother, why can't you speak of your pain?' and deep within I pull out unspeakable possibilities, extremities of an equal weight that would silence *your* silence.

I once saw a familiar face in the local paper, the 'Here Say' people-on-the-street column. I saw a face, plump and down-turned, with eyes that spoke through the greyness, well versed in isolation and dissimilar from my grandmother's display upon the mantel piece. Then, on a visit one day, I fixed my eyes upon a boy in a high school uniform, smiling. I looked through the glass frame, through the glossy surfaces and inside the eyes that told of trouble back then. Traces of fragility, pounded. You were always secretive and you're still haunted.

No, you're not dead, but in some ways there is no difference. The leaves of autumn scatter across my grandmother's yard, then disintegrate to dust and she tells me that her Jonquils flowered for the last time this year.

I've imagined us sitting at the kitchen table, laughing at our childhood antics. You were a sweet boy but your choice has been to fade from us as you lick your wounds to the bone. On the hand of your door hangs a sign: 'Keep out' and a mountain bike stands, solitary, in the hallway – these are the remains of my brother.

I wish I could unwrap you.

*Author: Tanya Petrovic, 2002*