

The Troubles

Aedan removed the cigarette he'd placed in his shirt pocket earlier that day and brought out his silver plated lighter. He normally rolled his cigarettes, preferring the purity of the tobacco, but he no longer had the patience.

He cycled through the city, the mist coating his face like dew on the sparse grass outside his door in the mornings. It had begun raining, the ink flowing down the pages in his hand. By the time he arrived at the pub to meet Cian it was evening. Aedan walked into the pub and passed through a group of men to see whether his friends had settled in the snug or lounge. He instinctually raised his chin when he saw them around a table in the snug.

'Aedan, grab a pint and have a seat,' Cian called.

'A pint of pale ale,' Aedan said to the bartender, an older gentleman with a good-humoured disposition.

'A pint of pa-ale ale!' The bartender pulled the lever and moved it back to its original position once the ale began to spill over; he raised the glass with no apparent effort.

Aedan moved through the men a third time, the younger man stepping back with visible resentment.

'I'm rid of the articles,' Aedan said and held up the pages in his hand.

'You won't need me to buy the second pint, then?' Cian said.

Aedan placed the pint on the grimy surface and looked up to meet the eyes of a redhead with hair pulled off her neck and pinned on her head. Her eyes were catlike and

soft. She resembled Eva, he thought.

Cian said, 'Aedan, Rose.'

When Aedan left with girls he met in pubs or bars, he'd go to theirs if he could. If not, he threw clothes, dirty and clean alike, into drawers and then showed them in the room. It consisted largely of the desk, guitar, and double bed dressed in beige sheets. When he lay between those sheets, he felt there was no reason to lift the top sheet again, unless he eat or piss.

When he fell in those places he sometimes resigned and floated on his back in the community pool, living in a reality constructed of sun and water. He loved that pool for the memories it elicited; the friends he'd seen emerge from its surface, their hair dense with chlorinated water, their eyes shut and lips pulled into comic grimaces. On the edge of the pool, he'd place his hand in the water to test its temperature and feel the water pull him with tender current, its surface reflecting sun in sheets of silver.

'You're studying?' Aedan said to Rose, his energy released in slight spasmodic body movements.

'At the same university. Art history.'

'Art history? Who do you like?' Aedan took a sip of his beer.

She smiled, her thin lips reddening.

'I studied in London for a term and never grew tired of the Rothko Room, in the Tate.' She contemplatively blinked. 'I could spend the entire day there. Ever seen the Seagram murals?'

'Only in pictures,' Aedan said.

'You could give us a proper tour,' Cian raised his pint.

‘I’d like that,’ Aedan said as he held her gaze.

After drinking several more pints, they walked outside.

Rose took Aedan’s hand. ‘Walk me home,’ she said, her eyes heavy with stupor.

Aedan placed his hand on the small of her back, feeling the warmth of her body against him.

Once they arrived at hers, Aedan opened the gate. Rose on his arm, sobered by the cold air, they walked beneath the arbour. She led him to her room and began to unbutton her navy dress, stumbling as she tried to maintain balance. He followed suit after a pause and removed his shirt and trousers. Aedan lowered himself on top of her and brought his hands down the outside of her thighs as she pressed her lips against his mouth. He removed her underwear and kissed her legs. After they finished, he fell asleep in her arms, his head next to hers and his leg between hers. He woke to harsh morning light and stared at her face, placid on the sheets.

He thought of Eva. She had not responded to his letter.