

THE BURNT HOTEL

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Titus Books

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For those who want

O Nehebkau who comes from the city: I have not
been haughty.

O High-of-head who comes from the cave: I have
not wanted more than I had.

(Book of the Dead)

Playing with the boys

I'm not crying, I'm washing my eyes
slouched in the Lost Angel playing
last card
with those naked men
 from the Two Dollar shop and drinking
endless tea
I donate my mind to science
and my body to you
sometimes.
Come and play with me,
because it is getting dark
and strange people pass on the street.

It is all movement and blurs of noise
Something old, something new,
borrowed money and blue movies: we
can be strangers on the train we
can be ghosts in the wind and I can tell
you all your secrets if you insist
(how your hand shakes over that coffee cup)

There are people who won't come
out until midnight, people who want you
to make them cry
so they can watch themselves doing it,

K rd is where the fish and the bird will live
now that they're in love.

All that's left are a few feathers, glossy with poisonous dye,
a sign which says Fresh Crabs (much too close to the strip clubs for comfort)
an odd aroma

if only I knew

even half of what
my granny said was true!

And then there's the strangers of the "don't talk to" variety,
no waiting for busses outside op shops for *them*; they're all
slack mouth and soiled trousers: came up for the weekend
and got too drunk to leave. They're sure every second person
is a freak (and needs to know this)
"oh I went there," they say, "but I kept my back to the wall mate,
I kept my back..."

This is the way the world ends
this is the way the world ends –
no this is the way the world forgets to end, lazy in the afternoon
with an unnamed thing from the all night bakery. All the world,
dawdling down the street replete with coffee
the footpath scuffing at its shoes, and suddenly it's time
for a drink or a friend. It's time,

and I'm still here, looking in the mud for your eyes,
just as children we used to uncover

the faces of the painted fish on our bowls, suffocating in fried rice,
just as adults we uncover
a blue smile, a hopeless arm beneath the blanket, a story.