

Poetry Competition 2024

Kevin Mclean: The Game

As I walk around the city I like to play a game.
I give everyone I see a history, a purpose, and a name.
I unravel the mystery of human lives using physical clues.

I see a woman wearing a business suit with running shoes.^[L]_[SEP]
Her name is now Alice
and she finds herself upon a tightrope
 trying to maintain
 a work/life balance.

When she was younger she had three brothers
who would ridicule her for being fat
but now she has traded them in for fat
cats who care less about the size of her
intellect as they do the size of her
rack.

Attacked on all sides by magazine articles who judge size,
her only prize are the family ties
that keep her from slipping
 from
 the
 rope.

She is driven by the hope

that she clears the way
for two young daughters
for whom she works and runs and fights every day.

A homeless man sits and smiles as he asks for change
even though he knows his situation never will.

His name is Bill
and once upon a time Bill had a wife,
but the thirst
for booze outpaced the thirst
for a happy marital life.

Every scar on his body tells a story:
 When he left
 When he was first attacked
 When he tried to go back
When he realised he had nothing left.

The only way to still draw breath
is to imagine it's all a test
and give himself over to God.

So now he strives not only to survive
 but to move on
 to a better place
when this one is gone.

I see two men sharing a kiss.

Steven and Chris.

They stand aware of stares
that judge a moment of beauty
as something worth hating
But they couldn't care less.

They are both blessed with family and friends
who never had to consider that the quality of a man's character
depends on the gender of his partner.

They have faced much worse than stares and whispers.
On nights out, drunken lads throw around words like queer and fags.
They contend with violence knowing it would end
if only they'd pretend
to be something
else.

So now every kiss is an act of defiance,
a Hey fuck you, come and try us.
A message ringing out in perfect silence.

In a storefront window
I see a reflection of a man

And although I already know his name,
I decide to carry on with the Game.

He is white
but his internal shade looks like it's been caught up in a Dulux paint fight.

He flashes from serene cream to key lime green,
a jealous smear on an otherwise flawless landscape scene.
In his mind there are red dots on every page.

He has long since forgotten whether they are from love or rage
but they leave him feeling pale and afraid.

He is a man but he'll never have his father's hands
or be able to build the things that he can.
In his home there are no shelves on walls
or children's laughter ringing through halls:

not because he doesn't have the strength to put them there
but because strong hands must be tempered by well-practised care.

He is born of the working classes
and tries never to become blind to the suffering of the masses.
He looks out suburban windows past cloned homes
to parts of the world where women are still murdered with stones
for honour's sake.

Where fields are ploughed by cracked nails
and backs break.

So he hides pristine nails inside a clenched fist
because middle class ignorance should never equal inner bliss.

As I walk around the city I like to play a game.
I give everyone I see a history, a purpose, and a name
I unravel the mystery of human lives using physical clues.

My stories probably aren't true
but people are not puzzles to be solved
following the picture on the box.

We are fairy tales
We are struggle songs
We are sonnets
We are arias
We are stories of pain and glory
We are just waiting

to be unlocked.

[You can watch the poem online here.](#)