



LONG CUTS

J. O. Morgan

*further wanderings in the life
of Iain Seoras Rockliffe*

B editions

to
the only girl I ever really loved

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Back for one month's recreational.
Back to Edinburgh.
Back for a night out with his biker pals. His bros.

Sat to one side of him
clutching their pints, their shots;
such a grip it's a wonder the glass doesn't crack,
sly shifting from empty to full
as they glug through the hours
sitting stiff through the hours
telling jokes, dirty jokes, and the rest.

Whilst Rocky, with his own drink,
his drink that is and is not quite a drink,
a cloudy pallid gently hissing drink,
strokes his thumb against the glass
to let the moisture congregate into a drip,
to let the drip pick out its wayward path
over his skin, his knuckles' soft red hairs,
to linger at the lowest point,
to drip, and be forgotten.

Till his pals run out of jokes
and start on him, for a while, at least.

*What's it to be then, Rocky?
Land air or sea now, Rocky?
How come you never buy a round, Rocky?
Can you count the cunts on two hands yet, Rocky?
Can you speak to us in Japanese, Rocky?
Can you fix our mam's new dryer, Rocky?
Give us one of your tales, Rocky.
Give us a lift in your car, Rocky.
Give us a laugh, Rocky.
You're so full of shite, Rocky.*

He takes it in good humour,
has learnt it's best to shut his hole;
a slit of smile to pucker up his face.

Whilst on his other side,
a flock of dolly birds who put away
as much drink as the men can manage,
though they go about it quietly,
of moments turn their whispers Rocky's way.

*Is it not time you settled down, Rocky?
What about your apprenticeship, Rocky?
Did you ever see a thing the whole way through, Rocky?
Will you stop with all this gallivanting, Rocky?
Will you be good to her, Rocky?
Will you stick by her, Rocky?
Take us for a ride of your bike, Rocky.
Take us home with you, Rocky.
One by one, Rocky.*

And, having said their piece, they turn their backs.

So Rocky downs his ginger beer,
its spice to sting his throat, to warm his gut,
wonders what the fuss is all about,
then checks his watch, counts to three,
takes a breath, holds it, stands

That's me away.

and he is gone.

Dismissing thought on thought as he tears
down the empty length of Princes Street:

In truth who really cares
where he has been or what he's done.
The city is world enough for anyone.
Why ever leave?



Still grey shapes of suited men, seated
round one end of a long dark table
in a high wide-windowed office
overlooking downtown Perth,

Australia.

The air inside the room suffused
with particles of smoke slow lifting
from the half-inch smoulder of cigars,
held static, angled out on bony fingers.

A solid silver ashtray sliding its blue-felt base
over polished wood, pushed silently
from figure to figure, six large white pearls
rocking, huddled in its shallow dimple.

We need to locate where they're coming from.

The pearls are perfect, any eye
would note their fineness, held up
to strong sunlight, how their outer edge
disappears, a hazy circle hovering
in the gap between finger and thumb.

*If it were merely one or two;
but a constant steady stream?
We suspect it's drugs related.*

A small glossy map is produced, the sort
given free to tourists, triple-folded, displaying,
in entirety, the kidney-shaped continent.
It follows the pearls round the table.

*Must be a port, or harbour, or some such.
Twenty reconnaissance flights; not spotted a thing.*

A portion of the western edge, fatly ringed in red.
A two-hundred-mile stretch of uninhabited coast.
No major roadways. Mountain. Scrubland. Dust.

*The council can't be seen to intervene.
Let's stumble upon this gang as if by accident.
Ostensibly your boys will be on exercises.
Hot-survival, that kind of get-up.*

A military official, leaning closer to the map.
Leans back, passes it along
for its next brief dusting of ash.

*I'll need two four-by-fours,
for the initial rough terrain.
Nothing too fancy. Hardy. Reliable.*

The Australian desert, stony flatlands,
bands of gritty brown, fading backward
to the sudden sharp grey cut-out of hills.
Beneath a white haze: two stationary jeeps.

*A few trackers would be useful. Native folk.
Pick those accustomed to our western ways.*

Figures milling round the jeeps.
Four in sandy fatigues, booted,
fanning themselves with their caps.
Four in jeans and red check shirts,
black-haired, dark-skinned, barefoot,
perched on the back of the jeeps,
stood on the roof, erect, still.

*The trucks no doubt will break down.
No matter, I've a man in mind for that.*

The bonnet of one of the trucks is up. Bent inside:
a stocky young man with short wavy hair.
A tracker stands behind him, silent,
watching every movement he makes.