

WETink

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Lightning, air uneasy, big, separate raindrops. Three youths, each of us modelled on characters in *Rebel without a cause*, cruise Melbourne's ghostly ghettos of shut shops kidding ourselves we are looking for whores. Bored, we hit the Ford Custom's anchors for a hitchhiker who focuses into an American musician from TV and newspapers. He says he plays the harp but claims to be no angel, a line I store away. Our harpist, who had been wrestling a box of beer to a party, invites us when we offer to drive him through the rain and warm air to the swanky address.

People wear corduroys in green or brown or bone. The house seems wallpapered with original artwork. We stand out like aliens in *The twilight zone*. The hosts are the potter and painter, John Perceval and his wife, Mary Boyd. Their children's pictures smile like exhibits of a happy life. Black leather jackets creak, our sideburns charcoal smudges against the potted ferns. I wonder why hoodlums like us are wasting our animosity, mingling with these mellow fellows who speak of movements and philosophy. There are no young tarts with uplifted breasts and teased hair among these guests. Our tattoos are different from their pictures. The beat belongs to Brubeck.

After everybody has drunk to excess and the shouts and jokes quieten, these artistic types take more notice of the way we dress. This is when events turn about as sometimes happens when grog has been gargled by a mob. They question, point pipes, trick us with clever words into revealing ill-informed prejudices, our job instincts. Mood darkens like a Rembrandt backdrop. The black night quivers with the brewing of a brawl. Somebody is about to get biffed if old differences escalate between us and these thinkers, musicians and bleeding hearts. That is when I abandoned my early brush with The Arts. I whispered, gestured, shuffled to safety with my mates, a Le Mans start. We fish-tailed away from the kerb and their curses, back in the direction of our nether suburbs.

Ian C Smith's fiction, non-fiction and poetry has been widely published in Australia, appearing in *The Age*, *Australian Book Review*, *Best Australian poetry 2004*, *Eureka Street*, *Meanjin* and *The Weekend Australian*; and overseas in *Grain*, *Magma*, *Malahat Review*. His books of poetry, *These fugitive days*, and *This is serious*, are published by Ginninderra, and he is working on a book of stories, *Voices crying out*, to be published in 2006. He lives in East Gippsland with his wife and their four sons.
