

# Caves

Roland Leach

She lived near the railway line on the leaside of older suburbs, with its turrets and wide balconies. I could never go to see her and she arranged where we would meet. Occasionally it was in the gardens of the city but mostly it was at the beach.

I would wait at the bus stop, sitting on a low wall, my back to the ocean, tracing her passage down the aisle, watching for her to push back her hair as she came down the steps.

There was something wrong with her brother, they said. I didn't ask.

Some days I would be waiting and she wouldn't arrive. She had warned me about her father. I would wait for the next bus then go home. But when she did we walked a thin trail through the rocky cliffs above the surf break till we came to the opening of a cave in the ground. I had been coming here for years with the guys. It was our secret place though everyone knew about it and we would smoke our first cigarettes. Now I brought her here, stepping down rock slabs to the cool darkness of a sand bottom and a hidden enclave.

From the path it must have seemed we were descending into the underworld, eyes straight ahead, never looking back, finding in a familiar darkness clefts of skin we wandered into.

There was one time she invited me, when her father was out, to meet her brother. She never mentioned her mother. At a first glimpse he seemed like anyone's brother, perhaps too pretty, a pale Elvis. Only when I drew closer I saw the white space in the heart of his eyes, the croaking sounds when he tried to speak.


It was just then that her father arrived home. I never saw such terror in a person's eyes as she pushed me out the backdoor and made me promise to stay there and be quiet till she came back.

It was behind the Poinciana that I hid till she came back; now excited and scared at what she had risked.

Later she would tell me that her father would not let her out with boys: *If they knew about your brother there'd be no wanting you, bad stock, they wouldn't chance a son like that.* So she had to wait till she was ready to marry, and when a man came along they would finally have to put her brother away. Hide him away for good, in an institution. Her coming out meant his incarceration.

A few months later we broke up. We were only seventeen after all. It was an early sign of the ease in which I could walk away without looking back.

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Roland Leach is a poet but occasionally writes stories to fulfil his narrative needs. He surfs, supports the Dockers and enjoys red wine. 

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