

THESE PEOPLE

BY E TAYLOR ©2013

The room is near empty,
a few clusters huddled over candles
like they are campfires.

It's 1 a.m. and this foreign heat
still beats like the belly of a dog.
The barman stuffs the cloth face
of some forgotten revolutionary
into another glass –

Twenty two, for twenty two glasses
we've been talking and his fifth smoke
sticks to his bottom lip
just like the first.

His name is Callum or Cameron,
I think, something beginning with a C.
Taking another puff, he coughs,
puts the glass down,
then begins again...

"That's why I got away," he says.
"These people, they're all the same.
Working some job they hate to earn some pay cheque

they can spend on a house and clothes and a car,
till they get a better job with a bigger cheque,
which they'll spend on a better house and better clothes
and a better car, till they get an even better job,
and on and up it goes."

"These people," he says. "I see them standing in line,
counting their coins, arguing over options.
These people are always hungry."

"And these people," he says.
"They think it's all for something, going somewhere,
somewhere up, some place better.
They build and build and plan and build –
these small worlds, these houses of cards.
But one day it'll all fall, then their kids'll
place them in some ditch and go do the same.
And round and round it goes."

"These people," he says,
"I'm sick to death of these people."

His words hang like a limp flag and I think,
"These people, these people. Who are these people?"

He's pointing at me now –
and I can see the grime under his fingernails,
those mustard teeth, grey-green eyes –
he's pointing at me,
and he says...

"I'm no saint, but I'm no devil either.
I drop a coin in the bucket, sign those petitions,
and once I spent a whole year fighting
to get the fluoride out of our water.
You know it can mess up your brain, give you cancer.
Mass medication, it's true.
But we still have fluoride in our water.
And the sea levels are rising and there's no peace in the east
and kids are still living in slums and still making t-shirts
and we're still buying them and chocolate and cell phones
and gems and a bunch of other things that we don't
know or care where or how they're made."

"It's terrible," he says, then takes another drag.

"But do you know the worst of it?" he says, leaning in.
"This dream. No one knows it, but ever since
I came here I have this dream,
this dream where I sit at a desk and draw.
I draw an old stone wall and
tall aching trees and a wrought iron gate.
And behind that I draw a long white pebble driveway
bordered by trimmed hedges and
spring flowers and bright green grass.

And at the end of the driveway I draw
a sparkling fountain and a big white house
with a hundred windows into a hundred rooms
with a hundred marble floors.
And then, then at the front of that nice white house
I draw a set of steps up to a
large oak door with a brass handle.
And I try, I try to open the door.
I turn the handle, press myself against it,
I give it all my weight,
but it won't work, it won't give.
So I knock, I knock on the door,
but there is no answer.
It is quiet, like a lie.
So all I can do is put my ear to the oak
and all I can hear are these people
and they're saying,
'It's so real. It's all so real.'
And all I want is to see it.
Even when I wake,
I want to see it."

He looks at me for an answer.
"I'm sorry," I say and he empties like a balloon.

Later I sleep and I dream his dream.
The door opens and
the room is near empty,
a few clusters huddled over candles
like they are campfires.