

TEA FOR THE JOBURG LADY VISITING PLET.

by Chris Mann

When at last Lucinda came
the melktert on the doily
lay like the irritation of her aunts
in bits and crumbs

"At last! " they said, "how nice you look,"
and the hessian bag and batik dress
sputtering with orange suns
took their place among the printed frocks.

"Well", chirped one, "the Golden City,
do the financial rockets
still patter down like sticks
or has it all changed
has it all changed? "

Beside her head, below the lawn
stood tiny surfers on the wrinkled sea.

I sometimes wonder why it is
the white and wealthy
line the edge of the land to die.
Brighton, Florida, and Plettenberg Bay
teem with tinted wigs.
It must be the warmth for quirky joints
windiness for wet lungs,
or even perhaps the unrecognised wish
to adapt
to a stupendous, heaving blank.
The devout in particular
are never certain of paradise.

Chatter in sunlight, chuckles
and the clink of a cup
orchestrate a sharp despair.
No-one at all expects
to survive
in the shapes of those who loved them.
Presence, the frill
and coolness of a china handle
is all in all for them.

Lucinda sips a rim and a tip.

I remember her jeans
and an angry student placard,
her wedding at St. Martins-in-the-Veld
and then her kitchen
bulging with servants who smiled
like co-conspirators in the plot of the rich.

"or has it all changed
has it all changed? "

Neither Lucinda
nor her dew-lapped aunts can see
the brows of the well-loved dead
which rise
at that unchangeable dread.