

# Two for Lunch

Sheila Smith

Gull mobiles turn  
above the station road.  
It runs full tilt to your door.

Rows of artisan houses –  
yours untouched, original –  
where railwaymen lived.

Through downstairs windows  
harvest of books, each sheathed  
in brown paper, title precisely inked.

Notices against the glass:  
socialist meetings, exhibitions,  
charred by time. The bell is silent.

But you appear, arms wide  
like a welcome chair.  
'It doesn't work in wet weather.'

I follow your emerald shirt  
up, up the clattering stair  
to your seasoned table. Salmon,

wine you're not supposed to drink.  
It could be a love-feast,  
presided over by paintings, pots,

glass, prints. Gifts from so many friends.  
Hand-milled paper you like to touch.  
You know so much, so much,

where Turner travelled,  
how Morris learnt to print.  
Ford Madox Brown's murals and canvases.

Rage against Roger Fry,  
'That old cawing crow'  
deserting English painters

making fashionable the French.  
Head on hand, you quote Dickens,  
Barnes. A Victorian sage at ease.

I drift into the picture, losing time,  
trying to fix it sharp, clear,  
knowing the colours will run.

Strong shoulders still; bear hug,  
though I can't get close.  
You keep your secrets well.

Eye to eye with a patrician gull  
you tow your years, a sturdy tug,  
knowing this shifting coast.

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