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MICHAEL MCKIMM

POST-TROUBLES POET

“tourism, not terrorism”

You laugh when I tell you I’m on the bus—
Allan’s Tours, Allan himself giving the lowdown
on the Lower Shankill Road, the tunnel between
the courthouse and Crumlin Jail. Neither of us
has ever been down here, this hauled-across

-the-hot-coals bit of Belfast, black terraces caught in
the shadow of Divis. No chance to get out and read
the names on the Peace Wall, no hop-on-hop-off here:
Allan has other plans—Titanic Quarter, up to Stormont,
all the C.S. Lewis/George Best grandstanding.

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But I’ve not shaken off the pitch-black murals, I who
do not wake in the mornings with a head
full of beatings, barbed wire, Molotovs. I do not wake
with it, the virulent ideas that rented out these
salted walls, these pavements, this thick red-pebbled road.

In his garden at Parkmount my granddad grew
radishes and my Belfast is the tart taste of those
small purple cloves. So tell me, friend, what is it
about Sandy Row that puts distance in our eyes?
We’re both fine-tuned to recognize the darkness.