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# Hairdressers

PAUL **MAGEE** \*

1

The hairdressers were there at the station and greeted us,  
nunchakas in their back pockets in case those blank blank  
fascists put the boot in again. Yulia was the girl  
I'd met on the train, her boyfriend, a Turkman, stepped forward.


A flame eternal on the burner in the kitchen  
at their hostel, gas as common as air  
but matches scarce just then, karate poster on the wall,  
sockets not earthed: no plugging appliances in.

Also at the blank Hairdressing Academy crashing, Oleg  
the friend from Ashgabat, an elevator repairer  
who had just left his job a month ago, for a while, it seemed  
it would always be there, there's always a set of stairs you don't want to climb

and no lift, to repair and they did all our hair  
the time we bussed into town, looked up and down  
the old city like tourists for my visitor's sake  
and no one attacked us. Thank God.

I don't think I was scared, just stupid in my youth, and amused  
by it. Julia had an East German set of scissors,  
the sublime scissors in the Soviet Union of that day, which  
was cracking up, but people still nurtured each other's best look,

went out and loved, would still house a weird stranger  
in spite of the racist outside, and by the icon of Bruce Lee

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2 Poetry

AQ3 AQ2

slowly swapped nunchakas for scissors. Why I  
remember this now? Each new haircut in their name.

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Paul Magee studied in Melbourne, Moscow, San Salvador and Sydney. He is author of *Suddenness and the Composition of Poetic Thought* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2022).