'Like opening a letter but the page is blank'

*How to Wear Grunge*, Ruth Stacey (40pp, Knives Forks & Spoons)

So, you got your poetry book out in the end and it wasn't glamorous or cool, although it is way too big to sit on the shelf or even hold easily, and the title is the kind of thing that seemed great at the time, but doesn't bear up to much scrutiny. But then neither do the poems. These are easy reading for indie-kids and would-be hipsters, lists of possibilities and observations, with the occasional cod words of wisdom thrown in for good measure. Such as this, from 'The Colour of Burnt Wood':

 Escapism isn't really any kind of escape:
 the things that haunt you follow
 into the smoky corners of the club.

And who'd have thought that:

 Humans screw up, broken ones
 especially

Startling stuff, eh? In her own (paraphrased) words, these poems are anecdotes that reinforce your perceived impression. 'Did that really happen?' one asks. Well, it doesn't matter and who cares? In a similar manner I could be wrong to take this at face value but it seems pertinent to this hangover of a poetry book:

 Seriously, tell me what a poem is
 then we can work out if this collection
 of words & images
 is entertaining fluff or more.

Or less. And if the author doesn't know what a poem is then why is she writing them? This is a would-be angst version of poetry, that self-consciously flirts with fashion, alcohol, death, sex and drugs and rock & roll, and deludes itself and any readers who might happen across it:

 *This sounds like poetry – are you tricking me into reading poetry?*
says the end of 'Not that, not Vague, a Real Quote, a Real Story', but no, we are not being tricked into reading poetry, we are being tricked into reading something that thinks it is tricking us into reading poetry. Here is an author that really hasn't got a clue: about poetry, language or what the blurb calls 'brutal youth and violent love'. This is sappy, half-arsed, melodramatic scribble, that deserved to stay in the little black notebook it was extracted from. 'Cool as hell' my arse.

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