Changing Gears

Even today over forty years rush by
at the speed of sound
each time i approach the intersection
of Henley Beach & Tapleys Hill Road

i was stationary at the traffic lights
that particular summer’s morning
sitting on my BSA Gold Flash

a screech of tyres alerted me
& then the sounds of crushing
metal & shattered glass before
the hiss & rise of steam
& though mid-morning on a Saturday
there came a stillness then
that still spooks me even now

it was the front seat passenger from
the car with the broken windscreen
i saw first
she looked close to full-term in her
flowery smock
had both her hands cupped around
her nose
but even then i was thinking of her
unborn child . . .
until she dropped her hands & i saw
her nose was spliced across the bridge
back to her cheeks
i’d like to say i was an urban hero
    tell you how i kicked the side-stand
out & ran to her aid
    but i was barely sixteen & the flow
of blood terrified me

all i could do was click the gear lever
one-up & let the clutch out quickly
    hell       i’ve seen plenty of blood
since then –
    much of it my own

i’ll never know if she & her unborn baby
made it through safely
    my only hope is they did . . .
& that she doesn’t remember that day
anywhere near as clearly
    as i still do.