

Autumn

Graeme Smith

Branches like stark arms grab their piece of cruel sky, whatever its shade,
Still against any wind...
But fence posts remain.
And so do telegraph poles.

I think back.
It wasn't always this way.
I was carefree with green leaves,
Flapping and playful, so many of them, like opportunities,
My humble bones were tucked within them,
Giving gentle shape that bent and buckled.
Until the seasons changed, and my leaves were other colours.
Golden achievements and accolades,
Red failures and misfortunes,
Both wrestling for the final word, and domination,
But uselessly, as the wind swept them away, bit by bit.
Those that remained with me turned brown.
They died as I held them.
Until they too were gone.

Now it's just me.
And the sky.
The wind and rain toy with me.
Age stiffens and makes one resilient,
Like a crucifix.

Hell

Graeme Smith

The pale sun sucks life from the day,
And splutters low in the sky, well away from here,
As we, always wanting, wait for night that never falls.
There is barely light to see, all is fuzzy and weak cream.
Where is darkness when you need it?
It hides everything.
But it never comes.
Dusk stays, always.
Stuck here.
I can't even touch you.

Mirage

Graeme Smith

I am a silhouette, a ghost, I float into the lobby unnoticed.
There are people who carry more substance than do I
- you can tell by their fine cut clothes and shiny suitcases and summer coats they dangle over
their arms,
They hover at the reception.
The snappy raising of eyebrows draws them forward and smuggles in a silent plea for
forgiveness for the momentary delay.
Urgency with a big U.
I look at their fussy busyness.
I cannot tell a grimace from a smile; maybe one on each lip.
Here the check-in gums flap with trained and feigned sincerity.

I follow those who are swallowed, swirling around, like a wine being tasted but never
consumed.
It's the intoxication of personality they avoid (though some splashes and spills to the
concierges and maids).

Down down they go, ingested to the belly, the guts, to meet their breakfast maker.
"How do you like your eggs, sir?"
Bacon and hash browns crust the air,
Trainee dowagers greet men without hair (that seems to be the price of success down here);
They are like a flock of ibis, with noses deep in the trough.

The full tummies rumble with exaggerated laughter, like a teenager drives his car fast.

There are corridors and spaces, carefully crafted to shun contact and contamination; shadows
vanish down the stairs, followed by the muffled sound of doors closing quietly, but with
haste.

I take the back passage, to tepid turquoise pools, putrified by chlorine, as King Neptune
pisses perpetually, and never misses.
The real ocean is restless beyond the security fence.

My time is nearly up.
I am burped, now vomited, back to the noisy highway, to the comfort of calamitous colours.

They say the fires came close, as singed saplings suggest. But the mirage survived intact.

Brave Face Graeme Smith

He is near, I feel, but close no more.

No sweat.

I see him sometimes, in his favourite haunts.

At any moment he will chuckle intrusively... breaking the dreadful silence.

How welcome that would be, nonetheless.

Wow.

He is busy in heaven surely, sipping tea with angels.

Do angels drink tea? I don't know.

His going was no shock really, though the end is always a surprise.

He vanished ever so slowly and I couldn't hold him back, here.

Many came to say goodbye, but no tears from me.

I needed to believe he is somewhere else, somewhere better - I believe that.

Cross my heart.

Lord help my unbelief.

Jesus wept. But I am not Jesus.

Deep inside me the contradiction cuts,

I have my own callouses, covering old wounds.

Love is like that.

A band-aid that tears away your skin.

We all want it. Love is a mist, a ghost, even when we add God's name to it.

I dare not cry.

What will others say?

They look up to me and want to see Heaven, further up, beyond my fickle and frantic faith.

He is here really. He smiles at me through the children's faces, and their children too, now grown up and walking to their own death someday.

It is an escalator down. Even for babies. Slow at first, then faster.

I look again... I see him lurking in the shadows? Ghosts don't speak.

They smile, though.

So do skeletons.

Is he happy?

Are people really happy in heaven?

Jesus wept. But I am not Jesus.

Libido

Graeme Smith

You vagabond, lazy layabout,
Pilfering, scrounging, stealing the clothes off my back!
You drunken lout, a puppet in god-knows whose hands,
or maybe a genie that appears when I try to clean my lamp.

You've led me on a merry chase.
You slimy swine,
You melancholy fool, you get no sympathy from me,
Look at you, feigning humility, locked in a church cloister,
then bursting out like a jack-in-a-box to surprise everyone.
But no one laughs. Guilt is the only aftertaste, but what would you know of that?

You are not the boisterous one, shouting, parading, but the quiet one, sulking, cringing,
always waiting for your chance, to push me aside and pull me into your mess.
Hoping no one will notice.

You dragged me around for years, following your footsteps.
Lurking it seems forever in the shadows,
Poisoning my pathways, subverting my aspirations.

So now we meet at last, you scoundrel,
I have finally caught up to you.
Now we sit and talk, eye to eye. Well? I've seen you in the darkness pretending to be me,
Even wearing my skin!
If that is not enough, you wake me at night,
Dreams that pollute my ponderings.
Stop sulking! "Not your fault?" Do you blame me for it all? A willing accomplice? Imposter!
You held me hostage.
You are not me, you never were, I swear.

Where are you going?
I am not finished with you yet.

Making a Splash

Graeme Smith

Bigger is better, it seems to be the way,
And bullies gleefully agree,
They wander around, devouring nearby others,
They say that some even swallow their own offspring (before they grow and compete).
They parade around like royalty, stuffing their small faces,
(forgetful that all food is a gift.)
Embellished with lavish iridescence, their glow is more conspicuous in the shadows, in the
dark corners and hiding places, but alas no light is shared to others.
They flirt like flamingos, flouting fate,
Though some are more reserved, in formal grey, as one would expect.

Privilege does not carve new pathways.
In spite of all their side-stepping, they still stay close to their familiar ways,
And they leave no tracks, just a slimy trail, to mark their shrinking, stinking world.
They rarely look up, except in shallow thankfulness for their primary place.

Surely they deserve it all, and open their mouths to receive their greed.
Though danger has them darting to the shadows, longing for obscurity suddenly.

What will they leave when their life is snatched?
Their despised offspring?
Or just memories and empty hiding places, all that was once their domain.

I am god to them, whether they know it or not,
Rain and sunshine are not my doing, but I do add some water on hot days.
I dispense morsels of food every second day, favouring the hungry ones, and ward off
predators.
I keep the pond clean,
I float water plants for sanctuary.
When they die or are taken by birds, I replace them.
Just like that.
Not that many see me, hovering to feed them, but I see them and count them and care for
them.
My visage shimmers and shakes through ripples.
It is not easy being god.

New Leaves Are Red

Graeme Smith

New leaves are red born in blood, like us,
They are pushed to the perimeter,
An unearned place of prominence,
They are young and snappy,
Playful in the breeze,
Jostling for sun and rain.

But look again: they are locked in place,
Their position fixed and foretold,
Tethered to green,
Like us all.

And the holders are held, by branch and stem,
All tamed by tireless roots, just out of sight.
What we call death just feeds it all.

For now, the red is our hope.
There is no hope without the shedding of blood.

Wounded

Graeme Smith

He cowers, donning the shadow of the old warrior, bent down,
Not by years but by the burden of pain and shame,
Pushed to the edge of sanity, that mad place, hell's forecourt, where even remorse is an echo.
He comes up short.
His smiles and laughter dribble and dissolve,
feeble, unconvincing, where once they charmed the masses.
Once admired, now despised, both undue, like elastic that pulls both ways, mocked in the
place of no forgiveness, where even the compact Christ cannot reach.
There is no clemency for some done things.
Hearts harden, creaking with the weight of the crown of thorns...
But there is no expiation.

He cannot wind back the clock - a wish we all share, to whiteout things, to sanitise complex
colours,
To purify the putrified,
Even ones that shape us and direct us and expose us.
The tapestry is not ours - deep down we know.
Leave it, lest we damage ourselves and rupture time itself.