

# When I was 20 something, coming home late

**Graeme Smith**

There is a time that clocks cannot count,  
A delicate time, when the naked night shrinks back inside her ruby robes,  
And cringes at the crimson of the coming day,  
When silence spreads its mist momentarily, precariously,  
Before the clatter and hum.  
It is the moment before dawn, just.

I was there then, suspended in the zone between,  
Like a secret intruder, an escapee, not wanted by either side,  
I looked only downwards, trying to conjure significance from my dancing shadows,  
Reassured by the chatter of my own footsteps, the only sound, like a heartbeat,  
And even that soon dissolves in the duplicit murkiness.  
I face the moment, where the umbral curses plead for my sanity and seek redress,  
and wrestle for my soul.

I cower at it all, too much to bear, my back bent down inside my coat,  
making my own shadow within.  
But as night retreats, the embryonic dawn exposes me...

# Why Is The Old Lady Burning Off?

**Graeme Smith**

Why is the old lady burning off?

See how carefully her leathered fingers bundle up the papers and things,  
like a mother packs a school lunch;  
See how deliberately her frail knees bend to fetch a piece of scrap,  
like a lover picks soft petals,  
For precisely every chosen thing must be offered up –  
the incense of past paper lives.

She sheds no tears, but simply steps back a little, half-satisfied,  
and wonders if it's really gone,  
Or whether God will piece the smoke together into unpaid bills and  
lovers' letters and secret rhyming words  
and know it all  
And call at last for her smoke?

She hesitates... then goes back inside to clean up again.

# Dusk

## Graeme Smith

Hazy clouds dunk into the ocean's edge.  
A cool breeze sanctifies the day  
and hastens all homeward.  
Sailing boats scamper for dinner and ale.  
Blue descends as life suspends its breath.

It is the time the lonely feel the most.  
A passing jingle of keys  
rouses the wino,  
opening doors to old times  
and places called home.

Half-lovers feel the dying day,  
the end of excuses for carrying on.  
The sweat of toil washes clean  
the naked body underneath:  
why bother dressing?

The children's voices grow louder at dinner  
while their father shouts beer somewhere else.  
Too afraid to face the dusk drive,  
he hides until it's dark.

The lights dot the hillside  
like flares from lost ships adrift,  
even before it's dark.

It's not night we fear  
but dusk,  
not death  
but dying.

# Strung Out

## Graeme Smith

Head bowed defiantly, with the grit of a commando,  
He cuts into the tender morning,  
The leaves above rain scattered shells of sunshine,  
Not that he notices. Not a blink.

Behind, the young lad follows the father,  
Invisibly connected, blood-bound,  
He stops to dance in the flickering shadows,  
falling further behind.

The father turns, his eyes fire like bullets;  
the son lowers his head even further, in remorse,  
His dance now an unsteady trot, as the father quickens the pace in  
punishment.

A suitable distance is restored.