

The Laughing Face of Youth

Ian C Smith

When the boss's containers packed with expensive Italian ceramic tiles leaves the docks he summons us by phone, a curt snarl. We need only be on call with our own transport, strong, and with the hides of illegal immigrants to unload at galley slave speed anointed by sweat. Undergraduates, we are scourged by this swine who performs as if gripped by a demon, his foul constant hectoring a weapon of war on workers.

Finding this job on the student noticeboard, we earn more for one irregular day's labour than most student work pays in a week. Between truckloads we three, the other two surfers, stretch languidly on neat grass beyond the boss's office, waiting, bonhomie overt, chests sun-glistened, laughter exaggerated. At the first sound of the next truck we spring to our feet without using our hands, ready like mercenaries.

The container truck driver watches, smoking while our Cerberus, bald, middle-aged, a bedlam of bellicosity in European-accented English, the only signs of intelligence his grasp of business, and the maddening insult, curses his toiling scum labouring at the double like miners edging ever deeper into a dark shaft rattling weighty boxes along a scenic railway of rollers towards the gloom of his cavernous warehouse.

Wise guys, our horizons endless, favourite books yet unread – think musk sticks rather than marijuana – unaware of time's stealth, our hectic futures, we come up with haemorrhoidal diagnoses for the boss, pain-in-the-arse quips accentuating his most repeated swearwords, vying for grinned accolades, inverting our strenuous workout into almost-pleasure to be remembered these years on, trees swimming in the wind of late afternoon, my body now in autumnal decay, that apoplectic man surely long dead from a stroke, this cry from the past, his presence, a surprise, my opinion of who called the shots back then all changed.

Author Bio

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *cordite*, *Eureka Street*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, *Shaping the Fractured Self* (UWAP), &, *So Fi Zine*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.