

laissez-faire

He cuts and tugs sleeping asbestos
wearing a wee white mask, of course
hiding his dark face under lowered lids
not that he wants to open his mouth.
A big ex-gangster who employs him
perhaps recalling his own beginnings
grins, silently checking the work.
He is refurbishing an old restaurant.
The ex-gangster's excellent teeth
often sparkle from the society pages
– his life could fill an opportunistic book –
but our guy of the slashing sharp knife
the tightly knotted bags of swirling fibres
that get taken for a ride come nightfall
uses newspapers for warmth, has poor English.
He arrives and leaves by the rear lane
enduring his nights in a Salvos bin
lying still, deep inside, in the dark.
He lets rip for \$12.50 an hour, cash
minus the cost of the facemasks
good savings for a man with his past.
He is advised, with a cold grin
to continue keeping his mouth shut.
He accepts these workplace conditions.
Imagine him high on hope, doing the maths
buoyant with every breath he takes
aiming to be prosperous one day, healthy
like his boss, the grinning ex-gangster.

A lone traveller

Thunder, lightning like faulty neon
illuminating oily water below
reflecting on stonework, reminding me
of Rodin's looming rough studies
then the loneliness of rain.

My floating face disappears
an exhausted staring man
shot by a fusillade of raindrops.
Behind that image what life
what relics of dreams, taste of grief?

Ian C. Smith. Two poems: 'laissez-faire' and 'A lone traveller'.
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Now a strange rasping wind sighs
or is it my breath, or a scuttling?
I walk through the cold marketplace
my footsteps following how many
centuries of spooks faded forever?

Those memorizing bad news have tramped
the stone bridge curved over the canal
endured, moved on with their dogs
walking the night, leaving no message.
This sky will clear, dawn's light attend.

Ian C. Smith