

## KEVIN SMITH

### *Roofer*

He came to fix the roof and finds the screws  
rusty and loose, and the ends of the corrugated  
iron not bent up to keep the rain from blowing  
in under the ridge capping. 'A lack of over-lapping,  
too', he says. 'The way this iron's been laid,  
you're one storm away from inundation.'

I leave him to it, and take the ute into the paddock  
to collect the old timber fence posts, having  
stripped the wires from them the day before.  
When I try to leave there's little traction. Shifting  
the spray tank over the axle makes no difference.

From the roof he sees me walking back toward  
the house. I've said nothing. 'I'll give you a hand,'  
he says on his way down. In the paddock he hitches  
a snap-strap to the ute. The wheels spin.  
'It's the driver's side hub not locked,' he says.

(cont)

Back at the house, rain brings him down  
from the roof. We sit inside at the table—drinking  
tea in waning light—and watch, through windows,  
the weather moving in. ‘Normally, I don’t say,’  
he says, then sips his tea and puts his cup down  
as if to say nothing after all.  
‘There’s so much in the world we have no clue  
about, and more we’re not meant to know.’  
He tells me then he has a feeling that the cancer  
won’t take her. ‘It’s just a feeling,’ he says.  
‘I’ve had them before.’ I watch the rain slide  
the darkening window glass, the tea gone cold,  
and the clouds closing in around us. ‘Mostly,  
I can’t tell. But Rachael? Well, I’ve got a feeling.  
That’s all.’ At the sink I flip the mixer, refill  
the kettle and set it on the stove. In dim light, a blue  
flame spreads across its metal base as if it were alive,  
a liquid thing from the spirit world we know nothing  
about. I watch him sit the quiet. I drop some tea  
into the pot and wait for the whistle to blow.