

## **John Grey – Three Poems**

### **A January Evening**

I welcome the impact of flame  
upon the heart  
as it sweeps from fireplace,  
over coffee table,  
seeks out whoever's  
comfortable on a couch.

No wonder my smile  
is warm and lit with red,  
the shadows jig  
or glide their puppets  
up and down the walls.

I revel  
as much as quiet and stillness can,  
in logs burning, word crackling,  
a hearth outlined with metal cherubs and dragons  
and sealed by chummy brick.

Burn on my precious fire.  
I have come in from the cold.  
And now I come in further.

### **The Way The Wind Blows**

She opens the window, welcomes the draft.  
It flutters her hair, cools her cheeks,  
acknowledges her presence  
and all she has achieved  
to be at that very place, in that particular moment.

There's no reflection to stare back at her,  
no fuzzy eyes, half-mouth,  
to despoil her image,  
abandon her face to the vagaries of light and glass,  
set a trap for her self-belief.

Her head no longer turns to his voice,  
The impressions in her flesh are not of his touch.  
And that rush of air  
is merely a consequence of weather,  
not her own mistakes.  
She wets, then holds up a ringless finger.  
The wind's in her face  
but it's blowing from behind.

## **The Old House Is For Sale**

My father still hasn't returned.  
There's not even the echo of my mother's mezzo.  
A car alarm goes off.  
Not mine.  
I already have all the alarms I need.  
This is the place where yesterday would be  
if it was anywhere.  
But one look at the place  
and I can tell the past is long since out of here.  
No wads of petrified gum.  
No clash of plates in the sink.  
No kids playing, baby crying.  
No one scrambling eggs as the radio sings softly.  
Not even a buzzing fly exploring the sugar bowl.  
No use asking my mother where everybody went.  
But, wait a minute. What's that sound?  
I thought, for a moment, my father was on the stairs  
but the footsteps faded.  
The yard is also uncooperative.  
No sparrows carrying off the larger breadcrumbs.  
Nobody in bare feet.  
Or chasing a mouse with a broom.  
I could call out to my sister but I know she wouldn't answer.  
And the traffic is tireless  
But it makes no room for our old jalopy.  
I do take a peek  
but there's no one hiding in the hall closet.  
And I double down on sniffing,  
but where are the odors of beans and sausage?  
No sweaters to rub.  
Nothing to make me swoon with delight.  
Memory is up to me.  
The walls, the floors, are not cooperating.

Then a hand jumps up to wipe something  
it's mistaken for a tear.  
If only naughty boys would giggle.  
Or a woman check the oven  
to see how long it is before the roast is done.  
Outside, no model plane flies low.  
Nobody pegs clothes to line.  
Not one boy runs away  
because he doesn't want to go to kindergarten,  
prefers the playground to the alphabet,  
grit under the fingernails to chalk.  
Everything's as still  
as old people used to be.  
Sun sets in the window,  
fills the room with shadow.  
No voice cries out, "Dinnertime!"  
No baby squeals.  
No photograph dons its Air Force uniform.  
It's decades later.  
The house is up for sale.  
I just pretend I'm interested in buying.  
I get the grand tour  
like I'm some stranger.  
And, truth is, I am.  
I bravely enter my old bedroom  
off-balance and afraid.  
I hear the sound of footsteps on the stairs.  
For the very last time,  
I am the one making them.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *That, Dalhousie Review, Thin Air and North Dakota Quarterly* with work upcoming in *Qwerty, Chronogram* and *failbetter*.