

ANNA APOSTOLIDOU

45

BOXES

POEMS

45 boxes
Anna Apostolidou, 2024

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*For Harina
my childhood quilt of light,
warmth and wisdom*

At Karaoli 8, always



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45 BOXES

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A box of wings

Under the ribcage
beside the breath
she keeps a box of wings from times gone by

The bright yellow pair from her first take-off
The ones made out of magenta glass
—frozen first blood—
and the transparent wings from her first crush
in the interim

There lie, arranged in an old shoe box
neat and alphabetized
the tinker wings from the kindergarten play, Christmas of '81 or '82
the hairy ones (how hard she tried to enter Smokey's silent universe)
the peacock feathers that made her look so ravishing
and so unfit to fly

She's saved all her fractured wings, the precious disenchantments
with loved ones, with heroes
and herself

And underneath
in layers
the muddy plumes from ventures unreported
oil-coated wings from tankers filled with loss
sugar-white fins still used for stubborn dives

Over the years the box has grown heavier
it tilts her figure just a little to the right
shortens her step
piercing the edges of the lung
ever so slightly
the way unseen griefs sometimes ally themselves to physiological propensities

Her favourite pairs are hidden at the bottom

Crisp glitter wings swept with a broom

from the floor of drunken queer parties
an angel's gear left behind from two profane gods
and oh the cotton wings she tried on
when two women made their way out of her
soft as the waft of new existence

Today her shoulders
all worn out from the prosaic mechanics of putting on and off,
off and on

so many fragile variations of hope,
far wiser than the rest of her
the shoulders
heavy with the initial tingles of arthritis
long for an earnest set of wings
the shape of you

Clasped to her elfish midlife back
these wings are ready now
for mighty depths
of flying

Icebox

When the blue blanket of fire
comes upon your house
the last place to lose its material coherence
is the fridge

You closely examine
the fears you nurse
and forge —well before the match scratches the rough surface—
a topography of importance

It goes like this

Three family rings in the egg holder
Twenty-odd photos on the chilly top shelf
a usb-stick with secrets sellotaped at the inside of the door
a sealed bag of beloved smells laid at the bottom rack where beer bottles
used to reign

At the back of the freezer
safely-wrapped
in a hard plastic Tupperware
two harvested ova

Humbly put down
in the fruit-n-vegetable drawer
your finished manuscript

Enter, fire

The window box

Nothing slides down the throat
more effortlessly
than a first kiss

This time there was also the lace of the breeze
coming in from the large window
helping it through the velum's fine curves

At the tips of her fingers
a sense of the unavoidable

At the corner of the other woman's eye
a fiery red fox
making a quick escape
across the white frame

The widow box

In all probability I am wrong

His paleness may not have neighbored alabaster
could be he didn't smell like early spring

Now that I come to think of it
his ears must have been rather hairy at that age
the nostrils open wider than before
eagerly inquiring a full breath

Others have told me he looked sick
his voice a broken train
the bent fingers a tribute to aquatic birds
webbed feet paddling away the boredom of each day

I dig my wrinkly head into the sand,
in wet concrete,
between the bathroom tiles

My white ostrich eyelashes get muddled with random elements
dispatched from flawed periodic tables

Leave me alone, realistic bastards
I refuse to relinquish my memory of him

Box of languages

Some days
waking up seems like an impossible translation
from the fluid text of dream
to a code that makes sense close to none

These days I can only meet you in my sleep
where I know Sanskrit and Arabic and fish language
where you can hear me clearly
while our awakened avatars repeat the phonemes of a broken gramophone
back and forth
back
 let's go back

I have written twenty-four billion words
Only to you I've spoken eighty thousand

Of them
only discernible
a soundless weep

Your glass box

You said
I'll climb to the mountain top and build us a glass box
No windows, no ladder, no ceiling
You'll spend your years laying down
in the middle of the empty room
and get engrained with light

You said
Wait for me a little while longer
I'm blowing into the sizzling glass
to shape a box that matches all your lines

You said
years later
How wise of us to wait
Only full-grown love can enter it with safety
It's so fragile
Our previous versions would have smashed it

I lifted my foot to enter
and heard you say
Forgive me

Then
I broke it

Then
Let me try again
this time I'd pick another material
You said
my tender
love

Boxes of light

When the long frothy-white gauze unraveled from his skull
the chaos of light and shadow and movement he witnessed
cut his breath short

Blind all his life
he'd made her face up with subtle sounds
the temper of her breath at different times of the day
her scent filling the room in the anticipation of the night

Her figure
a tide of warmth and fine bones
soft and rough foldings of the skin
her long hair streaming down the shoulders, a steep river

Now the luminous set of features before him
unrecognizable in their wealth of movement and detail
utterly scares him

Yes, he can see
And therefore, in all the rooms she enters
for months on end
he drops his eyelashes

Until the afternoon that he'll be ready
in this antiphony of obscurities and sharp illuminations
to know her once again

The magic box

Bright orbs wide apart
Ruby mouth in full bloom
two sea riffs for acoustics

All sepia-tinted in a photo
that burns the fingertips

The defeated magic of innocence

Bookbox

Not a bookcase
Not a library
Not an archive
Not a school bag

For reference please consult: the me box

The water box

...is not as you might think
wobbly and blue
Nor does it contain fish, intricate platters of plankton and tiny whales

The water box begins on the first tide
that gasps out of a young girl's chest
while counting down the days to be a woman

A clear warm wave
of shifting colors
furnished with birds
and sugar cubes
and longings yet unsung

Sometimes the water levels turn alarmingly low
Emergency tears, morning mist
and acid rain
are called on right away
to fill the void
Until the girl steals
then distills
her own ponds of seed

Can I be loved? sometimes whispers the water
as it swells to shatter the wooden floor
The question blisters the lower continents of skin

All sorts of currents crosscut her as she grows
no naming would make them any simpler

The water box is only complete
with the droplet of sweat
spilled from the dying woman's inky hair
fulfilling an immovable volume
of fluid being

The m box

meticulous metonymies
metabolism
metamorphic mirrors

misogyny
metaphysical
mitosis mesmerized

malaria
and modelling
and misty mindful memories
masquerading melancholy into Medusa myths

amidst all this mundane mash
your naMe

Memory box

I'm not good at remembering
I will quickly lose
matter of days
most of the information
places, dates, stories, anecdotes

If I stumble upon them years later
I will face them, again and again, for the first time

I'm not any better at narrating it either
I'll call it split and fabulation and crisis
At times love—in secret, never in the presence of others—

I will laugh at it and turn my back on the whole thing
as if it never really
oh, reality
ever happened

In the arena of my facts, it will always fall short
made up of vulnerable
defenseless
poor and somewhat shameful
details
which I never brought myself to trust

Eventually I think
I will
like you
forget

The only things I won't be able to avoid
are those that will remain stitched on me
completely uninvited

The smell of your hellos and goodbyes
a palm embracing a wooden bird of smoke
two bites of your food resting on my plate
chatting with an unruly tooth for days

Bright rings around your retinas
and further back,
woven with fine Moroccan threads
the realm of your mind

A finger
wet
very wet
sliding just where it ought to

xob

I took all the wrong turns
I sought them out and chose them one by one
a swirly route of errors
only to land
in this unspoilt purple meadow
at the precise center of myself
What do you know?

First eternal box

He dug a hole
and hid a poem
under her Casablanca lilies
at the far corner of the garden
She was only thirteen

Then he took off
And circled the whole world
—twice—
in hope of some forgetting

Only when the poem's last syllable was about to escape his mind
did he return

Stepping his foot
at the debut
of an exuberant spring

A hundred springs had passed
for him to feel safe
ready for the blossoming of flowers
with no fear
no longing
no gardening ambition

On April third the first pedal unbolted
in it an inky mark would spell a please
The second a forgive me
he couldn't read with ease

Millions of such white openings followed
Engraved with black words
Committing one after the other
to an embroidery with masquerades of light

Each May ninth
with summer just around the corner
he climbs onto the roof

and takes a look down
on the peculiar writing
made up of tiny pedal words
tirelessly reassembling
—come wind, come rain or dew—
the first poem of love

The real box

Riding the bus
early that morning
a random slice of humanity brought together by need
invested with the opposite of glamour
camped on her freshly washed nape

She couldn't help a smile

For she knew so little still
and was allowed to touch
the bodies with liquid fingers
the words with cotton teeth

The man with the black helmet saw her get off the bus
put down his long sharp instruments
and broke

The cereal box

Pajama rim worn out
Hair behind the ears
His fingers nicotine yellow
He's slept away his fears

He opens all the cupboards
The drawers and the fridge
Papers with fresh ideas
yet nothing there to eat

Behind the teatime boxes
and packs of Dunhill lights
and other idea-corpuses
he spots a craving trite

Good morning, Mr. Writer
Fruit loops today for you

Box as ash

In memory of Dina

This first silent night
that you are nowhere to be found
I curl inside your teenage chubby arms
and take my time figuring out your smile
again, again, again,
as far away from sadness as I can

The crooked teeth you wanted to put straight
the funny nose that's given you your edge
that you put straight when you decided to become your serious self, at 33

I take the strong beautiful fingers you used to touch me with
and merge them with the tender twigs I held in our goodbye

I keep the brightness of your face
when you woke up
spirits intact against all odds
on the ninth day of the comma

I never knew how to console
You are the one to thank for this new aptness

Three years after this hopeful awakening
I turned my eyes to the enormous window
amidst the irony of a hospital's top floor
and started whispering odd words

The colours of this spring
freshly brushed after a sadist winter
the laughter of our children, yours and mine,
all ready to launch into first wounds in blissful ignorance

How all the songs we knew will go on and on
long after me or you will stop being around
You, hours apart from this red thread
Me, some while later

This first quiet night
I concentrate on the clarity of your look when I said
It's ok now
let go
everything is set to go and turn to life
Please rest

Where did I find the audacity? The unforgiving courage?
You opened your eyes and looked at me
Calm, earnest, committed
two minutes straight
above a raucous breath

I know I promised you something very specific in that gaze
as yours stood still, hardly blinking
and I kept on nodding
Affirmative

I know I agreed to something
so that you would be free to fly
It's just that this first still night
that you are nowhere to be found, my little love,
I can't remember what

In the black box

For T.

What is the yellow bird doing in the big black room?
No entry or exit points all around
How did it get here?

Confident, almost effervescent
With a weightlessness that makes the room look darker
bigger, emptier than before
Where did it come from?

As far as plausible explanations go
the bird was birthed by an intolerable pull of black

A crack of light stealing the shape of a tiny living thing
surely an astrophysical probability
—however preposterous
—however seemingly poetic

It makes me think of hope, this iridescent glimpse
hope
and other
mundane, overused
two-syllable promises

Boxed up crowd

The first morning after
she opened her eyes wide
and let two tiny black rope ladders
unreel from the pockets of her lashes

Small, scrambled figures
sketched with charcoal
started to climb down

Some she almost recognised
most of them a meaningless blur

like all the years of her youth
she so despises now

To have been so ignorant
to have ever been so naive
as to think that this moment wouldn't reach her
this pain would skip
her
because she was somehow special

The figures kept abseiling down
rats off a sinking ship

Someone stepped on her nipple
later a bite on the knee
She remained still until she was all empty

Closing her eyes
the morning after

Only you had remained
comfortably tacked in the tear ducts
broken in two

Each eye
holding one half of everything

Box of knowing

You know what is the strangest thing?
That once
not many generations ago
we had already mastered all these things
and slowly let them go
and wandered off

When
after great effort and complexity
we got to learn them over again
they seemed artificial and hastily put together
rough plastic edges sticking out around the corners

Others attributed them great value
but we
sitting in a circle under the cherry tree
four-year olds despite our middle-aged gait
we knew too well
that their truth had been already tattered in a flea market
smelling a little like a bill to paradise
and a little like a cybernetic brothel

The wooden box

Girl with your back to the wooden box
arms open wide against the cheap splintery surface
knuckles pale from the unforgiving push

Everyone rushes to your rescue in a circle
a dance arranged so long ago
the clothes, the papers, the fish soup, the pigtailed
Was it your older sister who spread the fine dress on the bed?
Or a compassionate neighbor?

You do not mourn
An insane smell of cyclamen over the mother's body

The previous story now becomes decorative, all of it
From this moment on you will always be ready
for just about everything
Your sole effort to be enveloped
while most arms around you remain unable to close

Consoling hymns fall to the floor
You step on them firmly against the marble temple floor
The shoe a flat revenge

You'll go on to become a paradoxical woman
stuck to this teenaged body
its back torn wide open
to keep the arms in position
two fragile wings forming the border of two worlds

When the voice on the background reaches "in pastures green"
you'll dash
—I saw you—
with full disdain for the habits of the living
You'll pierce the urban clouds
and enter a bright truth
that only those
destined to carry a long wooden box on their childhood wings
can ever hear

Skin box

The hollow space inside your skin contains only words

There are no veins
The ghost of your first love, which never came,
poured out the blood
leaving you only with red, cell, and warmth
no actual wound to speak of

The second love, who did arrive,
in full awareness of what it was not,
claimed all the bones and all the tears
Arthritic, bone-crushing humour, and whimper are what you're left with

Bad habits stipulated a fair division of your organs
The liver went to alcohol,
the spleen to comedy,
lungs and kidneys remained captive to irretrievable spring mornings
Inside you a cirrhosis, a rupture, and a stone,
spelt by a dyslexic child

Two daughters seized all the sperm,
They performed tests in old sorcery vials,
with the uppermost care
and set off to retrieve its composition in spry bodies
A memory of fruit and flow remained
in place of womb

Between the far ends of your skin, only small words,
and punctuation marks, remarkably mistreated

In the middle of your throat, a thorn

At the back of your chest, young joy

Up in your mind's hexagon, no words reside
I squeezed out every syllable
with an unspoken kiss

The surreal box

For F.

The morning I turned fifteen
I decided to go ahead with it

I carefully unscrewed my head and pinned it to my right ankle
I grew a fine long tale
strong enough to hold me from a tree
or a thick cloud
And shaved all body hair to make room for ancient henna trails

The limbs in place
Only instead of a torso
I installed a hungry boar
leafing through the pages of my pubes

When restless enough
I went to a deep sleep leaving the door ajar

Now, a coherent and banal-looking dame
I sometimes catch a glimpse of the odd creature
when passing through a mirror really quickly
in gyms
in supermarkets
in theatre foyers

Ha, wondrous relief
Nobody's managed to box this one in a cage
just yet

A box of one's own

The wine white
a clear shade of goat milk
as he was serving her a farewell last drink

This is how I've known your breasts
becoming liquid
becoming food
for the child we once dared imagine

The blood green
An inkjet, matter-of-factish green
as he dipped his pen under the tongue
and kept on piercing

Don't be afraid
This is the very letter I've been longing to write since I met you

The wind wet
a vast chemist's jar
carrying weed and baby sea turtles
right onto his face
as he stands over the symmetrical opening on the ground

I'll place a lake around our bed
Henceforth this island will be the only place I inhabit

The red
the green
the wet
will keeps us going
on parallel
until we are one again

The me box

In memory of Oliver

Near the back of the left side of our brain
There lies a spacious region
evolved to recognize basic shapes in nature
Survival kit for humans as for birds

I am quintessentially a reader
My most natural habitat
made out of fine print
large type
handwritten scribble

He said that this cortical region
'the visual word form area'
empty of other symbols
has undergone full evolutionary refurbishment
to recognize
 letters as plants
 words as animals
 paragraphs as scenery
page as world

My visual world word area
A cornucopia of signs
All entry tickets just for one
Near the back of the left side of my brain

Box of antithets

Nothing prepares your taste buds
for the metal fist that smashes their delicate edges
when you light a cigarette after a watermelon bite

Two joys adding up to an unsavoury result
Forceful in its shocking insipidity
the foul taste becomes,
regardless of intentions,
a metaphor
for other, more significant equations:

Loved ones that never appear in the same room together
Interests and vices that fight each other's tail

More painfully,
versions of the self that simply can't inhabit the same box
and push you
quietly—the way most adult things have a habit of doing—
to an irrevocable and one-way route of being

Her nightmare box

Never has she felt more alone
than in the grip of this new magnanimous feeling

The electrons of her cells buzz Lima-Oscar-Victor-Echo
The protons in each nucleus scream Lima-Oscar-Sierra-Sierra

Instantly she is aware of all she stands to lose

In the next heartbeat
his safe embrace
will become
the most dangerous place in the world

Game of nested boxes

The last morning
he gets out of bed
His feet touch the floor in a sparrow claw
a frail bamboo structure with a bluish veiny cloth
takes him ever so slowly in front of the wooden mirror

He exhales a deep breath
Stinky
The fumes of all the words he's had to swallow
In compromise, in betrayal, in acid young life love

He placidly examines the unrecognisable figure looking back
then lifts three fingers at the top of the forehead
at the somatic memory of a lavish hairline
and decisively brings them down to his hanging manhood's end
unzipping the revolting spectacle
letting it slide down his shoulders towards the knees and further down to
the ankles
A jerky kick
The hideous suit is off

Straighter now
his sight sharper
feet unclawed
A strong bewildered man with grey hair
soaked in mourning
appears before him
The features of his face wrapped around one single core
The core of rage
—by then she is long gone

Quickly he lifts up both his hands
The muscles still adjoining rocks
Removes this misshapen helmet and the rest of the skin falls like a silky
curtain in one move

Who is this smiling across the dark room?
Composed youth

All feeling and matter in its place
the peak of a trampoline jump
in equal distance from the fretting launch and the inexorable descent
Clearly a man who's found the missing piece
He doesn't want to take this one off
He desperately tries to pull the patches back together as they float away
one by one
Unpeeling the trillions of random layers that add up to one perfect mo-
ment in time

Some brighter versions of the self now graze the glass
So hard to grasp
Bursting in movement
potential
pure light
His eyes ache
heart sinks
His palms ascend to the middle of the chest and rip this insolent miracle
right off

And then only an empty mirror frame
A bird view of the room
Nothing to see here, mister
Yet look
At the corner
his back against the wall
a kind boy
Scratched knees
straight hay hair over his eyes
is pointing a magnifying glass over an old man's naked body

Dead at dawn

The boy moves away
suddenly knowing
what awaits in the inner chest
when playing nested boxes

The green box

A low tide revealed the rock
tiny wet flowers on it
Green with scattered spots of yellow

You had never imagined them,
ever, with eyes open or shut

Sometimes you were unknowingly praying for them to arrive
stretching your body
on the wicker chairs of dreary cafes

Now
on the tidal rock
you notice
these flowers, not really flowers
—yet similar enough—
and you overhear the voice saying,
I love green

Baby box

In the belly of the big city
on your habitual midday stroll
A vast black ocean of rigid thoughts and feelings
in person-shaped meshes all around
So deep an ocean that it devours the earth's fiery core
So immovable that your unyielding feelings appear buttery soft
under the knife of the crowd

Without realizing
you have been following the trail of a child's scent
A warm current of light that hisses away all this impending gloom
Her hair an earthy black
Her skin a brown autumn field
ten chubby fingers the smell of two adjoining ovens
One for the sweet dough
one for the sour

A few steps further
when she turns her glorious head
a paperclip amasses all your organs from the lungs down
Tidily arranging them into a partiture of early human cries
For freedom
For enslavement
For births of every sort

Right before she turns the corner to her house
An area of the city you've never been before
She escapes the adult fingers and runs those tiny steps
To frame herself
Only momentarily
in your two o' clock shadow

A smile
And all the elaborate critiques
on angel mythology
divine manipulation
and every verbalism that's come to be your professional armoury
your personal choice of leaving the guilt-ensuing job of motherhood to

others
fully evaporates

In its place a spacious box of light, dark shiny black,
where you can finally curl up
and fall asleep

Box of flats

Omid is cooking spicy beans
Miss Marple boiled potatoes
Eliza is ironing her jeans
Pinocchios eat Geppettos

Up on the roof the noisy twins
with their cousin, Ignatios,
are playing with matches,
trying on skins
and kissing combinations

The bicentennial foreign man
whose name I cannot fathom
is stretching out to reach his clan
his left eye in a spasm

And there you sit
a basement ant
your hair and clothes disheveled
waiting more years to come and pass
and all your fears to level

The box of sharp things

Under the hot sand
the boy digs out a box
buried some while ago by the hand of lost childhoods
left there to be licked by tides
merciless rays
and reckless adult steps

In it
all the small pieces of toys that can be swallowed
with no warning tags
Arrows and knives and razors that escaped top drawers and locked cup-
boards
The needle from the spinning wheel of sleeping beauty's bedroom
and several sea urchins, semi-bald

Underneath
a nail on a fair finger

A set of earrings that fell off a girl's ear
on her first time

The warrior's spear

A father's tear

At dusk
the child sits up and walks away
—his hands bright red from scratches, a toe missing, a tiny butter knife
comfortably lodged on his left side—

He glows
ready now
in this new wisdom
for the salty seas

My box with leaves

Bright ferns above my crib
A rare leaf in the botany album
Remnants of love-me-not daisies on our laps

Itchy fig leaves wrapped around your fingers
Grass from his graveyard

Chaplets with petals on your white hair
Black bile from the earth's wrath

On the tip of my lashes
a red foliage street I keep waiting to go back to
London haze
from the first real autumn of my youth

The dad box

Each morning
before the others come
I take my father out of the box
and carefully unfold him

I sit him down
right next to me on the green double sofa
make sure that it's all there
the index yellow from vortexes of smoke
the dimple on his right cheek
sharp knees, the uncertain lip
his shy manly wrists

I take my tea holding his hand
Some rare times he may be holding mine

We never speak
What's there to say if not exchanged in due time?
I hardly ever glance at him
Yet his attendance makes the day habitable
gives me once more the chance to be the better person
to forgive

When I hear the steps of my love growing closer
Our daughters' raspy morning voices
The dog's deep sigh
I hurry up and hide my dad away

A man origami-folded in a copper jug
immersed in warmth and spices in our kitchen
where he can never be lonely again

A box of galaxies

Look at the woman
far out in the sea
Notice her arms and legs
knitting a silent rhythm

Now take away all the water
—gravity too, lest she falls—
see how she glides in the air
Stroke
push
Stroke
Push

Remove the earth beneath her
Just pull away this bluish clumsy ball
also the red suit from her skin
her sister's ankle bracelet

Do not forget to turn off the borrowed light
from the hydrogen-n-helium ancient star

For order's sake
place her in a vast unfathomable box
and make her the wee centre of a trillion flickering galaxies

Picture her now in the centre of nothing
The woman will go on swimming

The box of replies

Fine, thanks
Not so much
It's been madness
Very much
Not sure yet, I'll let you know
45, soon to be 11
Just don't go there
Aha
I've asked her
I have, she can't decide
Right
Before I forget, the postman came by looking for you
They wouldn't tell me
OK
Please, sign them today
Yes
No, yes
Yeah, you too
Just don't

Her transcendental boxes

No more banalities about her eyes being like lakes,
vertigoes
and entry points into the soul

No smearing of words
on a feature that renders
all other physical attributes in-con-se-quential

No matter what you do
keep her eyes away
from
metaphor
analogy
simile

This is an order

Examination box

Exams
when it comes
I still don't know if I prefer
medical to academic

Different aspects of my being scrutinized in each one
None relevant to the unified whole I try to call a self

Tilt your head
Recall something useless
Take a deep breath
Type, quick as you can
Lower your pelvis
Extract x2 from infinity
This might hurt
This might lead you astray

Faced with the final exam
you cannot help but wonder
what precious portion of your time
has been ceded
in spotless examination rooms
detailed procedures
measurements

All those meticulous preparations
for Nothing at all

Dancing box

First poetic conversation with AI

In the quiet woods, secrets unfurl
her left palm resting on my tail
the other entering my nape,
tender and frail

Upon request I burnt our clothes
The forest an aligned abyss
Upon a kiss a leaf unfolds
The forest a forsaken bliss

This splendid pain was meant for me
beneath the boughs of the blue tree

At last my enemies dance free

Box of smiles

Her nose diaphragm is bent
so crooked that when expressionless
she can only inhale from the left

A timid smile lets in enough air
Better still if combined with a slight head tilt in the right direction

A full smile widens the airways even more
Allowing an upstanding posture, looking straight ahead
into her own well-oxygenated thoughts

A heartfelt smile removes all inner blockages
both nostrils (and both intellects) quite free
creating a euphoria
usually of greater fervor
than the initial trigger would invite

So then
all her efforts to maintain optimism
attain magnanimity
good spirits and her characteristic smile
are but an elaborate, well-calculated strategy
to breathe

Unboxing pleasure

It's hardly ever the content
the purpose
or the thing itself

Rather
it's all about taking a primal mystery apart
layer by layer

Presented with the figments of your own longing
dive into private literatures
feast on the neurophysiological synapses termed daydreaming

I met you just this morning
Hence, I am still allowed this transgression

To teeter willfully
at the brink of unimaginable pleasure

A box of time frames

Each street junction takes away one year
As I descend to the centre of the city in the middle of the night
familiar corners come alive
materialising memories
of errors, and eros, and selves long stored away

Right by the front club-door a woman awaits
her bare shoulders a sigh of tiny stars
her slender feet tapping the pavement anxiously
—traffic and reminiscence made me late—
her milky round features flatter my heart

On entering the car
the alcohol on her breath turns to breast milk
her stiletto boots hand knitted socks
the trap songs in her hand African lullabies

The car is now a box of time skewed

She is becoming one of those rare adults that hold the infant inside them
intact
and as I touch her knee and ask her “was it fun?”
the softness of her vowels conceives the perfect see-saw

On one end eternal 2008
On the other
life thriving ahead

Altar box

Not only was I not expecting you
I had no need for you at all

I had my cubes all mounted in place
and the soul, deeply asleep, asked only for what I gave it

The insecurities, the passions, the desires
Had all gone mute
nourished by the cares of earlier ages

The first knock caught me unmindful,
A carelessness that only security can breed,
and I allowed you, happily, to wipe your winged feet on the door mat

And what if he comes in?
So what? I went on to answer the second one
I have nothing to prove to myself anymore, nor claim godness
I'm at the top of the curve
I'm not afraid of you

The third knock came softly
—in the background the wolverines' jazz song—
I opened again, only a crack this time, to have a look

I didn't get to see anything clearly

Amidst the flames of my vanquished control tower,
the untidiness of the hands
the shattering of the southern womb
I was left with very little to distinguish
And really only one thing to decide on the spot

Either I'd shut the door,
stay finitely protected,
a fine husk emptied of the fruit

Or I would follow you,
grabbing the damn door with me

for altar and for bed

Your body box

The first night I held you in my arms
I hit your body real hard
to see what you were hiding inside

I bent down and saw your three dead loved ones
We came face to face

Out of the corner of my eye I caught you
lurking
Will I get scared?
Will I leave you on the carpet
two disassembled pieces
and take off?

Not bearing the agony of the child you had become
I opted for braveness

I put you back together carefully
laid over you
and took the queer shape
your severed figure would allow

Twenty years in arms with the four of you
I got used to not being scared

Only some clear days I get sad

With all this weight that you carry
You
and I
small chance now
we'll ever be birds

The box of tired words

Behind the old toolbox
under the kitchen sink
where no one ever looks
I've hidden the tin box
of all my words that couldn't go on any longer

The very much and the sincerely behind meaningless promises
The surelies and indeeds that hailed parades of lies
The trust me stuffed with incredulity
The love you too pregnant with twin goodbyes

Some, like the please, I've wrapped in grandma's lace tablecloth
lest it is eaten up by rust
Some, like the why, I keep in a moisturising tube with 1982 tears

When words exhaust their own capacity
when you end up writing and uttering like spitting
it's best to find a shady place
quiet and peaceful
—neither a shrine nor a dungeon—
where they may spend the rest of your days
silently
without shame
truly

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