

## Collected Dwellings

by Mark Vuaran

1.

As a child you gave me splinters and dirty feet  
From your paling fences and terracotta tiles,  
Beestings and tadpoles were also gifts,  
The shock of clover and water condensed into life,  
The fascination of tiny tragedies.  
I heard you in the falsetto of ice cream vans  
Or the bass tremor of distant trains  
The riddling of patchwork birds  
And the serenades of unfixed dogs.

You painted me with vegetal extracts,  
A palette of pastoral tints and essences  
Like lawn mowers that atomised Sunday afternoons  
And the chloral syrup that stained my skin  
With football at the park,  
Mulberry stigmata and that dense silkworm smell  
Or the sweet absinthe that followed  
spring showers, warm and heady.

Your imperfect skies were enough,  
Smearred with cloud fibres and the ambiguous  
Flight paths of planes, the way blue was stretched  
Until breaking point, like water drops vanishing  
Onto cement, or sapphirine dawns where  
The world developed like a photograph.  
Remember how I would get up early  
And watch you, that slow wake of pleasure

Like rising sap,  
Or falling rain.

2.

Across the road from my primary school  
I discovered the shrunken head  
Of childhood, the scenery that constricted  
Vision, and the faint smell of a  
Domestic life cauterised by changed  
Locks and the cosmetics of amnesia.

Sheets that accumulated at the foot of my bed  
Like a graveyard of soiled ghosts,  
Paint that peeled back like a marriage,  
The perforation of windowpanes that  
Spat the street over my desk-  
A household in purgatory.

I escaped into pages or empty bottles,  
Ink that was drunk and drink that was  
Drawn like tattoos down my throat.  
The new school made sense now  
I had courted dislocation and been  
Rewarded with the polar kiss of exile  
A shaved head and verdigris eyes.  
Left to trace a future down  
Train lines and bus routes  
The dirty intaglio of the city's  
Delphic palm.

3.

It was all part of the renovations  
A pyramid that lurched above the semi  
Like an architect's idea of modernity  
Or an ancient's attempt to embalm time.  
There was a terrace that hinted at a roof  
Bedroom walls fingerprinted with blue  
A bathroom that unrolled like a corridor  
And a ceiling that was a tryst of vertices.

Living there was a deflowering  
It was a fan that idly juggled its blades  
It was a mattress that witnessed  
The shuddering termini of both instincts  
It was an attic door that enticed  
And swung open on sabbath nights  
It was the small white love of terriers  
Whose nails staccatoed the floorboards  
It was the anaesthesia of old wounds  
And the imperceptible drift of blood.

It was the ocean that breathed through  
The house like a drunk, that peered in  
The windows, that gnawed at the iron,  
That snored with tidal apnea  
Lost in vast barnacled dreams  
Whose points broke off like sea-urchin spines  
Fragments to provoke under skin  
Like a poem's dredged up lines.

4.

The threshold unravelled me like a knife cut  
Doorway that collected a siamese riddle of orchids  
And a moonstone left like an orphan  
The shuffling diaspora of footprints.  
And once the lock was broken, metonym for  
A stolen pillowcase, the uncoupled anchor  
Of a trust surrendered in carats,  
And the violation of a glory hole.  
And all I wondered was what  
A stranger had recognised  
In the skeletal exposure of desire.

But what insomnia could not resurrect,  
Theft could not exorcise,  
And I chased don juan  
Down sheets thick as denial  
Between walls fraternally thin  
Beneath the narrow gaze of venetian blinds  
Where I found only the soaked commerce  
Of t-shirts and sex,  
Two flights of turncoat stairs  
And a relationship composed  
Like a message in the air.

Between the vivid frame of thai restaurants  
And the confected passions of women  
I saw my face in his cascade of sensitivities  
The way he tilted with streetlamps  
And the stampede of all night buses  
The laughter and strength that  
Tightroped back to my infancy  
Past black-outs and annulments  
And a night when a telegraph wire  
Snapped like a magnesium whip.

5.

The closest to consummation  
To the sewer-grate navel of the city  
By the black umbilicus that trafficked  
In the addictions we are born with-  
We lived, on an avenue unfolding  
The steel origami of European car-yards.

The apartment was disputed territory  
For the Lilliputian swarms of insect life  
Refugees from a sub-tropically themed courtyard  
Their antennae oblivious to our parochial claims.  
It was there also that a cold war was waged  
With mould, the symbiotic infiltrator of bedslats  
Shadows and the soles of shoes.

And sometimes we drew blood  
Drawing our own borderlines-  
Pursuing a witch-hunt of emotions  
Through locked boxes, message banks  
And syllables of hair, paths that led back  
To the inevitable stacked pyre of sex  
And the nightly inquisition of flesh.

It should have been a beginning  
But autumn broke us  
Through the bedroom window  
The precise intrigues of wind and leaves  
And quiet tears eroding intimacy  
When nothing could stem the slow  
White libidinous flow  
Of sunlight.

6.

Outside the night is creaking like a ship  
A bat is tracing stars like a compass  
The fridge's intestinal murmur  
And the quiet shiver of two blown globes.  
I cannot be sure of anything tonight  
I tell myself, staring at a possum's silhouette  
On a branch that bends like a fencing foil.

Somewhere a spider dips his legs into air  
Tasting the edge of awareness.  
Is this the reason for the soft festoons  
Of web in the cornices of the room?  
The trivia that betray a genius loci.  
Or are there still secrets to be overheard  
In the galvanic ghosts of smoke alarms  
And the thick arterial glugging  
Of five a.m. petrol tankers.

I watch as my breath clots  
On the cold touch of space  
The jealous embrace of an empty house  
That recalls the crossroads of fear and love.  
I have been travelling through  
The suburbia of the heart  
Postcoding my memories in a  
Rhizomic search for permanence,  
Like a tree chasing the taste of water.

But for now there is only a reddening  
Of fabric, some new shoots through  
The window grate, and the atrophy  
Of a balcony covered in dry leaves-

The delicate reflection of  
These few words.