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Spit and Stick Cocoons

Once we climbed five hundred steps at Borobudur
climbing through cloud and all of our Buddha selves,
meeting ourselves coming down again in each other's faces.

Afterwards you sat on a step and wept
and your tears ran through the creases of your cheeks
as through the kinks and folds of a long dry river.

I recall that you have been in touch with saints
throughout your Gerald Durrell childhood –
although they showed themselves mainly as butterflies struggling out of
stick and spit cocoons.

Still I mine you for information mineral by sparkling mineral
as the child you once stole cement grain by grain from the builders next-door,
to build a world beneath your stilted house – the roads as elaborately
branched as vines.

While I sleep on the night train back from Yogyakarta
you watch a cockroach climb up and across the seat in front,
each cramponed foot perfectly placed on the ascent.

She is planning to journey up Mount Bromo,
but first she must take the dimensions of every obstacle –
her front legs held out before her like a water diviner's rod.

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Later we walked upside-down in the Antipodes
cooling our heels in creeks –
relearning the shape of the place through the soles of our shoes.

We pitch the tent in a thrum of cicada song, the baby cradled between us.
Tireless you had carried him on your back all day,
asleep now his feet paddle and kick as though retracing the journey.

The lantern makes a theatre of our giant puppet heads joined at the lips
on a night full of its own radiance and busy rotating stars.
I want you to know that this is being written in tai chi

each gesture taking an eon – each kiss electric enough to power a city
state.

Lying nose to nose you tell me that at 19, when you rolled the Beetle,
a box of spices on the passenger seat covered you in ginger, cloves and cardamon

and that you walked home inside a heady cloud of fragrance –
hands gilded by streetlights and turmeric
and that the scent and colour never completely rinsed away.

My wasted youth, you say, but I am enchanted.
It conjures in my mind an image of sky-clad Sadhus,
receiving the voices of birds and insects as pigments on the skin.

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Lately you have grown a moustache and delight me with the Tok Pisin –
maus bilong gras

I play its ticklish taxonomy over in my mind – a grass specific to mouths,
a grass that belongs to a mouth – now I can't take my eyes from it.

But my smile dies on my lips when I wake to read that the Holocene is over,
that an ice core drilled from a lake in Greenland has closed a chapter
11,700 years old.

In despair I look for the stories where yours became ours – the point of contact.

I trace dot to dot to dot across your back – mapping the faults and occlusions,
an ingrown hair, an inkblot birthmark, a scar, a mole with the profile of Napoleon.
No, no! I try again, looking for easier interpretations.

How to take back our Buddha selves? With sums?

One glorious son, thirty-six summers, twelve thousand nights, four years
on Bougainville,
a miscarriage between house three and four, six dogs, a chronic illness?

For the sake of these stick and spit cocoons
I need our nightly knocking together of heads,
the knitting together of hands, the lifting up of eyes but this morning
I let you lie.