excerpts from *That kind of door*
by Alan Finlay

door

I want to give my son a door,
to hang across his
far room, something to open

to close.
Something to start.

a dark door
a light door, a

door painted red.
It doesn't matter,
a door, with hinges

open, close

keep lightly shut
slam. open
again
that

kind of door.

For our fire

Something blue washed through me into your fire.
Sparks hissed up, waist high –
it wasn't water, it was paraffin

and the flame leaped back onto both of us
collecting us, scorched children of the night
lying beneath leaves, the offering stars

as they whispered to us: *you are already there.*
There is no risk in taking love into
your body, letting it burn, a paraffin lamp

or a twisting veldfire set alight by wind
or shrapnel, glass. The risk is letting it burn
so no-one knows

calling the wind back to the surface of
the sea. The risk is listening to those
who do not believe in burning.

And when the black sacks of smoke lisp
above this earth: they will find that we were here.

Long-distance

my son on the skype
screen, looking
rad
boss, he said, my hair this
way

it's different i said,
just longer he said
And then he took me outside

to show me the garden,
where his mother had dug
the pond into the soil

and spread the lilies. The garden's
looking great
he said
at last, i said.
What? he said, but i think he heard me.
Is the doorhandle

fixed? I asked
no he said,
and when you are alone, what do you do
I latch it
he said.

The crossing

We are building something here,
first chance. Make it good, love.
Let's build the decking to the ship

we want to float, unhitch the sails
trapped on the mast, let go the birds
in all their detail – love, we are building ships

for us to travel. Let's stay, let's
make this plan work, divide the map
let's make the map divided work in pairs

love, let it happen, go
let it happen language, a hurt, a scar
lost signal between two cellphone towers. What earth

drags us here, flies us here, with stitches on
my throat, with fingers through my hair, my love
will this be the other side with you

accept this

accept this crushed response, this toe's
fixed artery, this love with
its heavy throat, this fear, this anxiety

accept this: open door, closed against
the cold, winter heaving like a lung
accept this, closed door, lung without a sky

all these rooms
take them into you, make room for another
room beside the one you keep for me.

through these streets

and you,
my son broken,
splintering

ash
you my
son
with awkward
drums
where are you
hurrying to.

Amongst the fathers

I watched him play
the rugby match –

the same gawky stride,
thinner than I imagined
him, last time I saw him

the same decisive
uncertainty going
into the maul

the same willingness
to follow
direction, to have it straight

the same hesitant
outspokenness
chastising another player

to be a part
of the team, to fit in

I thought he looked
vulnerable

with his thin
white legs, and his
angled determination.

It took me a while

to recognise him
I don't know if he saw

me standing there. I
thought that maybe

he did, amongst
the other fathers

scattered along the
sidelines.

I went up to him

after the match. He was red, sweaty
still complaining
to another boy.

Someone greeted
me with “sir”, then shifted

to the side, as if to
let me in. I stood beside him

as he bent
down to do something
with his tog bag, I was right there: standing next to him

I said: “Hello.” Firmly,
questioning.

He didn’t look
up, he said: “Jesus” or something
he didn’t look at me at all

stood up
and walked
away

wait for him

i.

I have lost my child. He is
strong. He
has roots, he knows

how to bake in windows.
He has
steel, growing wildly

into the earth. He has
delicate patterns like tendrils

on the wall. He has a sky
he has, these

footsteps, now bone
now

ii.

Wait for him, to come
round here, hands

hitched in pockets,
smile like

tin crumpled
in a fire.

No use telling
him. Or even

asking;
no point saying
    you can

see it in his
felled anger; in the clutch

of his
temples; you can see

it in his
angled roots, the stiff way

he walks down to
the water.

extracts from

mopani

i.

uncertain windows
where do i go

my child
on the edge of the willows,
low in the water,

what does he see
that I cannot see?

As he watches
through the binoculars
his throat contorted, dry

until the scratching thorn
bleeds him into shade

until the water
comes, pouring

father father
where are you going,
why are you leaving me

And what use
are these

hands, with my
son gone?

What can they hold
like “truth”
a word I have used

insistent, awkward,
“the truth is”

place it on the table
where we argue
again

the crocodile
will not
move. The elephant

on the ledge of
water, darkly
shakes its trunk

stamps the
concrete on
the bridge.

One of them has
to cross
to the other

side.

ii.

the bird
the guide explained
whose name I

forget the bird
is a sign of water

and when the fire
comes to their
collapsed eggs

they lift the water
they, all of them
on their wings

like so many leaves,
to douse the hiss
of eggs

I watched
the vultures
through

the heat,
looking for
a kill, something

final, something
certain, bloated

hissing
Something to say.

I saw
their heads
in the dry air

v.

The bull is in
charge;
Ears pinned back against the ringstone

one eye
gored to close,

turns to face
the car, edges its shadow
closer

vi.

We cross the bridge slowly
the water black beneath us
as we gibber wafer
birds in the heat of the car.

We don't stop for
elephants anymore.
Their eyes gelled
inside their skulls.
Their whiff of stiffened skin
musked by shit and gallons
of piss.

You just cry,
frustrated, hide your face
in a book of animals

don't you feel I love you dad?

I shift
from my smoking place
where sun-shrikes
thread the

gland of a stream
make way for the
sweeper's
broom,

as she switches
the leaves from the place
where i was standing.

You watch me from the
verandah of the
Mugg & Bean, waiting
for our pancakes.

I want to say:

See how dark the birds fall
catch the light!
See how their glittering

empties itself of longing –

There is a sadness

that blows both ways, both ways
do you hear me?

One wing lifted, the other one
tethered, do you hear me?

This ton of steel, this way.

It burns up, and it goes
down. Do you hear me, now? I am calling.

There is one way to leave this earth.
There is another way to return.

Do you hear me, plans gone wrong?
Mr Plans Gone Wrong.

An open door. You can leave
anytime. Or forget again.

A closed door, your heart
scratched out with pencil lead.

Oh, that thickening. That running,
that going, that going forever

The school tie

i showed him how to knot
a tie
he practised and i
straightened it, a mirror.

then later his friend taught him
another trick,
and he preferred that saying
this is neater

dad, this is not a knot
of water, or how to kill
a snake,

or a long road that goes nowhere

so i have to close it
off with thorn-tree
branches.

it nests neatly
at his throat, this new
school tie

his friend showed him
how to
knot.

To that sea

that crashes erasing everything
returns and takes another breath
to that splashing sand – to that wind

that howls against the legs,
to that bush
that particular thorn,
those clouds eloping

that green sea, that faraway – the drill of distant ships
if i could close these arteries of longing – i would.
If I could rearrange this,

forever. this
distance. This try. If I could
go back to where it begins, where

love begins, the hurting sea,
the life that poured into me. if i could
remember each swollen step,

say hear me, hear me