The Language Creatures
Also by Isobel Thrilling

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To my husband,
who has given me love and support over many years
The Amber Shop

When greyness becomes a wolf at my door,
I remember the amber shop
set in the washed-out blues and whites
of a crumbling east coast town.

Preserved sunlight: the amber is pale lemon
through to dark cinnamon,
stored afternoons from cretaceous times,
ancient raddiances made solid
and carved
into necklaces, animals and fruit,
the colours of marmalade
and butterscotch,
apricot, mango, gold and peach,
nasturtium, wallflowers, primrose, ginger.

People absorb its terra-cotta rays,
surely their blood is charged with fires,
its essences, its vegetable lamps,
imprints from antique forests, staves of leaves.

A substance light and almost warm
to the touch, a living thing
transmuted with all its sugars and chemistries,
distillations from sky and earth.
Who could want gold or other metals
when they could
wear this murmurous cargo?
We are all pieces of amber,
the universe re-made running through our veins.
The Saxon Lyre

It lay near the sea at Prittlewell
in a prince’s grave
with the folding-chair and vases,
armour and sword;

the ghost of a lyre.

Its broken,
wooden pieces linked by stains
in the soil
created the ancient shape,

shadow-music.

Ravens of grief
still hang
in the grey and silver landscape.
Did warriors
sound the precious metals
of lament,
clashing their weapons
in despair and celebration?

Most touching are the repairs,
the delicate gold
and silver
rivets worked with precision,
the handmade nails.
Long plank of wood,
strings joined at one smooth end,
fanned like
the wing of a bird,

it preserves
the reverence of hands.

Reconstructed,
an echo of shells in the notes,
once again, it weaves
its bones into the cadences of men.
The Singing Bowl

I hadn’t known of the Tibetan singing bowl;

once told,
it haunts my head.

Echoes
from peaks, stars, snows,
high, sweet blade
of frost
or thrum from copper sun
roll through
its strung substance,

hollowed stone, spun clay
or mineral dish
with shimmer and hum.

A note
with feathered edges
like silk
or full as the moon
slipping metals into the lake?

Spinets and samisens spill
along axons,
a lute, a harp, a gong,
a bell;

cup of sound to hold the world.
Birth of an Escapologist

This bowl of hyacinths transmits
a blue pulse,
scent heavy with thunders,

a bruise,
a thug at the throat,
the child is drugged with boredom,
slugged by sweetness.

The afternoon
swings its cosh and elderly aunts,
avid yet powdery,
flutter their bones, ecstatic
among the tea-cups,
sleeves rustle like membranes.

She has lost the power to hear
their voices,
just a needle of sound can stab
the silence
wound round her head;
the air wraps her in hot velvet.

She is living a fairy-tale,
the chrysalis of a child in thrall,
she must weave
her own colours, make inner fabric.
Wings of curtains drift over
this new creature
assembling its natal flight,
the skill to release herself to the sky.
The Language Creatures

Some words are satisfying as good tools,  
those for artefacts,  
terms for things we do.

They give a solid heft on the world,  
we love their grip,  
they help us brew and build and shape.

Other words are tenuous, half-seen  
they glint at parties,  
prowl through committee, business, bank,  
fabled beasts,  
at one with the gryphon, unicorn, gorgon.

Most fearsome is when tongues fail completely,  
we sense amorphous wraiths,  
qualms, sensations, terrors  
that carry no title,  
(not fish, nor fowl, nor good, red herring).

Not all are perilous, some flicker  
suspended radiance,  
imprints, intimations beyond  
the reach encoded in genes or neurons.
All language trails the weight
of a trackless deep,
where creatures wait to be born, given a name.
Before Lazarus

Leopard: dark firework undetected by the impala, slips through ebony, mahogany, thick night alive with jasmine.

Invisible lamp: brain igniting filaments in nerve and tendon, unloosing fibres in jaw and paw.

Her leap assembles.

A velvet hunting-equation with claws and teeth, a piece of physics written in language of the cosmos;

the furring of maths.

Such translations, shape-shifts in the firmament, strange as Greek myths, are never perceived as miracles.

Kin to stars, we, too, are the old din of the universe.
Blood, lava, bone and clay evolved
from a chunk of sun,
we are the planet given a voice,
clunch of grief and love.

Electrons in stones are the same
as those in a human head,
we are sky
and reassembled time,
life is a metamorphosis of death.

We were raised from the dead.
Tracking the Gold Frog

Dusk clings to shoes and clothes
marooning faces
to float like balloons,
footless we come down the hill.

Lizzie picks up trails of leaves,
collects them like
footprints from huge, gold frogs.
Aged three, she does not
know what tracks the world,
unicorns are as likely as birds,
woolly mammoths
could raise their heads at a zoo.

Medieval chemists never turned
lead into gold,
yet the earth achieves a deeper
alchemy with trees,
armadillos, nightingales and Lizzie.

We, too, follow tracks in the cosmos,
astral paths, great beasts of light.
Angels could flow natural
as electricity, hidden shoals.
Deep physics
with its other dimensions,
illuminates the grain of imagination,
opens space in
the firmament, where the spirit can go.