Behind the Poem

It's a bit like looking inside a watch, the way they used to be, when the case was finally slipped apart and you saw the delicate machinery; the naked back-and-forth of it still whirring its dumb dedication to the task. Puzzling. Ordinary.

Behind this poem
it is as dusty as the space behind my desk
where no-one ever cleans.
Small, lost things lie forgotten.
It is as dull as the backstage of a country theatre.

Someone has dropped a shopping list.
There is a rubber band and a used condom, a lot of torn tickets and cigarette butts.
The props say tropical island on one side and unpainted marine-ply on the other, but there is still a hint of music back here, the perfume of illusion.
Smoke of the old addiction hangs in an empty room where I practice my lines in your best voice.
In the Wrecking Yards

on a beach in India they drive old ships
up onto the sand
and cut the steel into plates
like scales of an armadillo
flakes of the great dead thing
inanimate
a body scattered by ants

on a scarred bench
the heart of a dissected mouse
beats faintly a while
but it can't be put back together
the textbook doesn't show how
and the teacher doesn't know -
that's not his purpose

in the wrecking yard of poetry
apprentices sit with a spanner
and time on their hands
undoing the lines one by one
throwing old metaphors on this heap
broken rhyme on that
watching light move down the wall
waiting for the bell
the end of the shift

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