

FIVE POEMS

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Shame

A 10-year-old boy committed suicide in Tondo, Manila after his aunt put makeup on him and posted photos on Facebook Monday afternoon. Upset, the boy went to his room and locked the door. His mother followed and knocked but received no answer. The victim's mother forced the door open and found her son hanging by a silk scarf from the doorjamb at around 1:20 p.m. The boy was in a kneeling position, with the scarf looped around his neck. –Philstar.com

There wasn't even a moment spared
for thinking things over. It had to be done
quickly, urgently, like it was some drill
learned in school. A protective measure
for emergencies espousing the need to
renounce panic. Duck, hold, cover
when the earth suddenly shakes. In cases
of fire, evade smoke at all costs. Head
calmly out to the closest clearing for air.

And so the boy did as he deemed
needed. In a sudden attack of bullying,
survival instinct kicked in, sending him
to take measures in the quiet of his
room. And when the door was forced
open, there it was: a betrayed 10-year-old's
version of surviving shame. Silk and gravity
weaponized. Death as survival came
much quicker than the rescue of prayer.

The Virgin

I broke it. This petal—pink and punctured
in my palm. A piece from a posy disentangled
by my hands. I'm a clumsy virgin on my first
job: delivering warmth and fondness coded

in flora. If this bouquet is a message, did I just
compromise the meaning? What if this petal
is the word *love*? What if the point is love
and love now is missing? Sender to receiver:

I _____ you. Is Mr. Receiver to simply
fill in the _____? And let Mr. Sender bear
receiver's insouciance? The code is marred.
My negligence is to blame. I shattered love.

Settling

When the dust settles, the quiet, too,
perches
on the surface, clings to it
tightly, like a vagabond finding
his perfect resting spot, desires
to seep into the surface,
takes dibs and calls it his.

Meanwhile, our hands turn restless,
fraught
in their need to wipe the dust
off its claimed residence, ever aiming
for movement, for resolve, always
untamable, never hushed.

And then we gasp in awe at our feet,
remarkable
in their loyalty, walking along
with brash obedience to the whims
of our hands, never complaining, never
negotiating to be still.

Sounds of Wonder

Chirping. Children at play.

At the shore, the grazing
of slippers against the sand.

The flops of waves communing
with rocks. The squeaks
of bubble wrap in your hands.

The burps of live air pockets
squashed between fingers. Gas
escaping restraint. Breeze
setting still leaves into motion.

The corkscrew's whistled
release. The assured fizz
of virgin wine. The crackle
of fire. The stealthy scampering
of smoke. The turning of wood

into ash. Loved ones deep
in slumber. The quiet of a
dream. The secrecy of humming.
The mystery of a gift's wrapping.
The shattered innocence
of a gift's unwrapping. An idea
perching on the mind. The gliding
of pen on paper. The [kiss](#)
of fingers on the keyboard.
The cracking of ice. The whimsy
of water. The fiery murmurs
of words. The exhalations
of grief. The sweet lull
of your lover's valved voice.

Notes on Clouds

Notice the clouds:

They turn resplendent
only with the help of the stars' glisten
or the sun's shine. How they rely on
something else for a taste of the spotlight.

Notice resplendence:

How we long for it
only when the gloom proves too much.
What is there to say about gloom? That
it is a cloud that has finally lost its steam.

Notice gratitude:

How we often savor it
only in the context of failure and loss.
Don't we fail and lose too much? How then
to explain ingratitude?

Notice loss: