

Five Poems

Jaime An Lim

Grief Is Nothing Like This

Nothing no nothing like this, the brief days
Scuttling to some dank corner to hang their heads
With the weight of the impossible hours, their hair
Sweeping the floor in the current of the river
That carried you past the hold of time and memory.
The day you buried yourself in the sand,
The fish flashed their quicksilver flanks in the light.
The waves rushed between blue sea and white shore.
The undertow brushed their delicate shadows
On the moss-green pebbles in the shallows.
The time you threw the heft of the mountain aside
To reveal the promised land, a plain teeming
With gold, the land of ripening grain so vast
It brooked no limits, or crushed the idea of limits.
You were lord of the open road under heaven.
Your story nonlinear, elliptical; no closure.
Your mind a whole cosmos of possibilities. Endless
As the night sky. Its reach beyond Alpha Centauri,
The depth of dreams, the breadth of imagination.
Who would have thought you were prince of the land
Only for a season and then your munificent youth,
Squandered with reckless abandon on this glittering
And hungry world, would forever be gone?
Like a shooting star that for a moment was all fire
In the darkness, before becoming darkness itself.

Reading the Times

Janet Lim-Napoles, who first appeared on the radar screen of whistle-blowers in 2001, has dismissed as a 'product of lies' allegations she engineered a P10-billion scam over the past decades using mainly pork barrel funds of senators and congressmen for ghost projects. —Nancy C. Carvajal, Philippine Daily Inquirer

Baghdad—Militants from ISIS have killed 500 members of Iraq's Yazidi ethnic minority during their offensive in the north, Iraq's human rights minister told Reuter on Sunday. Mohammad Shia al-Sudani said the Sunni militants had also buried alive their victims, including women and children. Some 300 women were kidnapped as slaves, he said. —NBC News

The relentless litany
of senseless cruelty and greed,
whether it's morning papers,
or evening. Murders and massacres.
Rapes and robberies.
Bombings and terrorist attacks.
And corruption, left and right,
the shameless stealing and stealing.
And afterwards, the endless lying
till they are blue in the face. A broken
record of self-righteous denial.
How depressing. It's enough
to make you puke and give up hope
on the human race.

Foreign news is no better. Or worse.
In northern Iraq, in the towns
of Quiniyeh, Hardan, Sinjar, Ramadi Jabal,
Dhola, Khana Sor, al-Shimal, and Khocho,
ISIS militants gather the mountain villagers,
and separate the Yazidi men from the women.
The women are given to the fighters
as wives, or sold as booty and sex slaves;
the men lined up against the wall and shot.
With every burst of the Kalashnikov,
they shout Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!
As if it were something to be proud of.

What has the world come to?
When have we become so hateful?
Forgetting that every man is somebody's
son or brother or father.
And every woman is somebody's
daughter, sister, or mother.
Deeply loved and deeply cherished.
How would they feel if it were their daughter
who is being ravished? Or it's their son's
head rolling in the dust?

Would they still cry *Allahu Akbar*?

Last Days

And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. —Matthews 24: 6-8

Strange times these are. Inexplicable
happenings, frightful auguries.
Red rain, like blood, falls in Kerala.
Live fish and frogs pour from the sky
in Yoro, Honduras, while in Brisbane, Australia,
on a perfect day, hailstones the size of tennis
balls, dent roofs and shatter windshields.
Millions of starlings fly as one, whirling
like black dervishes in the sky over Denmark.
Islands sink and disappear into the sea.
Pilot whales, a pod of twenty-four,
beach themselves in the Florida Keys and die.
Red tides spread like poison in the Pacific
and the Atlantic, washing dead fish ashore,
so many, the shores are more scales than sand.
At the mouth of the Catatumbo River in Venezuela,
a thunderstorm rages without let-up, throwing
countless lightning bolts into the water.
Floodwaters in China, India, and Bangladesh
rise over the rooftops, drowning thousands.
A giant tsunami washes away villages in Banda Aceh,
tourist resorts in Phuket and Sumatra.

A typhoon puts 10,000 in makeshift body bags,
buries the seaside city of Tacloban in debris and mud.
Here, it is rains floods landslides storm surges.

Elsewhere, in the Horn of Africa,
it is the other way around: a long rainless spell
that leaves the watering holes, rivers, and lakes
bone-dry, and the earth cracked for miles
and miles around in Somalia and Kenya.
Fields and pastures are parched and arid. Grass
and trees die. Cattle and goats die. Bones and hides
litter the deserts of Ethiopia and Djibouti.
People drop in their tracks and die. All skin and bones,
children roll their heads and die, their ribs jutting out,
their staring rheumy eyes ringed with flies.
Giant sinkholes, capable of swallowing whole cities,
appear overnight along the dying shores of the Dead Sea.

And in the air, rumors of war. Fighting among men,
fighting among gods. Over soul land oil. And a wave
of lamentation drawing nearer by the minute. Urgent cries
for help that may not come. Or may come, too little, too late.
Over the horizon, a caravan of clouds carrying blood rain.
And in the eastern sky, a sudden unholy awakening:
all the world's dead whirling like dervishes, and a swarm
of startled seraphim mouthing frantic warnings
urgent messages in a Babel of tongues.

What is causing that terrible racket in the mountains?
What is that dense rotting smell of sulfur?
What is this blanket of ash that is covering the land?

why is it so dark in here
where is the light

Canticle

Epithets abandoned
On the shoals,
An avalanche
Of mass and drudgery.
Fawner of foam.
Swift bearer to nowhere.
The flux and plunder
Of grief oozes
Under the rampart of silt.
Oodles of ellipses
Cover my body
With a tatter
Of bruises.
Dear thief dear fraud
Dear magician dear swami
Of perpetual sorrow:
Grant me sufferance.
Stroke my back
With your argot of pain,
The lash and blast
Of your wrath.
Bind me chasten me
Penetrate me scorch me
Purge me stretch me.
In the night souk
Of desire,
I am all blood,
All passion and abandon.
When I open
The book of prayers,
You are all I sing,
My psalm and canticle.

Because I Begged You

Because I begged you to bring me to paradise,
I prepared the house for your coming.
Because I filled the cup of bliss to the brim,
I tasted the sweet, the bitter, and the sour.
Because I counted the hours like stars of annunciation,
I kept the morning from walking out the door.
Because I gathered the world in my arms,
I felt your nakedness beneath the grass.
Because I fondled the shell of your ear to hear the sea,
I licked the salt in the hollow of your throat.
Because I closed my fingers around your headstrong rock,
I caught the dew in the palm of my hand.

Tell me: What paradise is sweeter than this?

The background features a complex, layered design of overlapping, semi-transparent leaf-like shapes and wavy, curved lines. The color palette is monochromatic, ranging from light gray to dark gray, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on organic, flowing forms.

Filipino

