

# THE ARCHANGEL GUNITA

## and other poems

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### The Archangel Gunita

What cannot be rewritten will be retold:

An explosion, a gunshot, not through my body, but the body of my partner.  
(It might as well have been my body.)

Over her body, on her funeral pyre, her only good suit was laid.

Over it, a paper house, paper money, and her paper aspirations.  
All to smoke, everything, including my desire to talk about it.

On the eve of our anniversary, the phone call first thing in the morning,  
as if in a predictable teleserye, "*Ate, patay na siya.*"

There was a scream that came at me from myself. So unsurprising  
it was, I didn't recognize it.

And the *katahimikan* was a hard, ambiguous thing,  
sometimes space, sometimes place, an envelope of a letter unsent.

The mention of her name hurt my bones;  
the mention of other words had no solace, like *magpakailanman*, and  
*payapa*.

The common words like *kumain* were avoided, and *matulog*. The uncanny  
word *magpakamatay* loomed sure but was never spoken.

But just as the barren land razed by fire is seeded by unknown seeds  
brought by unknown things,

The wind, also the world, also God, brought back the word *mahal*.

So softly the L licked the top of my palate with its gentleness,  
I hummed back other words.

*Gunita* floated above like an archangel and plucked me from the silence.

On the open palm of her left hand, the word *pag-ibig*.  
I wrote on her ashes with new hands, “remember me.”

The poet is a sieve, a portal, where the universe passes through.  
The poem is what cannot pass.

**Note:** *Gunita* – Filipino word for remembering / memory. *Teleserye* – a Filipino word for soap opera. “*Ate, patay na siya.*” – Filipino, “Older sister, she is dead.” *Katabimikan* – Filipino word for silence. *Magpakailanman* – Filipino word for forever. *Payapa* – Filipino word for peace. *Kumain* – Filipino word for eat. *Matulog* – Filipino word for sleep. *Mahal* – Filipino term for dear. *Pag-ibig* – Filipino word for love.

## How the Moon and the Stars Came to Be after the Bukidnon Myth

One day, in those times when the sky's face was so close to the red loam  
They kissed the way two women could then, only in the dark.

A spinster walked out in the early blue morning to pound rice.

Before she began, she took off the glass galleon beads from around her neck  
And the turtle shell comb from her black hair oiled with coconut oil,  
And hung them on the sky which had branches just because the story tellers  
said so.

The sky looked like limestone coral with many pools of blue,  
And the hard, porous clouds jutting out like stalactites  
Touched her head with a cool rockiness.

The pestle was smooth and long under her rough palms,  
Her muscled arms rippled like tide pools,  
And each time that she raised her pestle into the air it struck the sky.

She pounded the rice all morning, the pestle struck the sky hard  
That the sky began to rise, and it went up so far she lost her ornaments.

The comb became the moon  
And the beads, the stars.

Her chest missed the heaviness of her beads  
Her hair, the weight of her comb.

What is not in the story is she who gave her these things  
Why she is called spinster instead of wife.

What male storyteller erased her as she slept  
In their hut, we will never know.

This was also how loneliness began,  
The weightlessness,  
The namelessness of things.

## The Poet Looks at Herself in a Mirror

Hands over eyes, I speak to you and hear only myself form words  
like *tree* and *dragon fruit*.

What these images conjure is a time lost after its speaking,  
recovered as gesture.

A window framing a river is itself  
not anymore scene but pastoral

And you, standing beside it, gone to seed—  
A dream of an infant.

I move my hand over your face, my way of saying  
*Gone*.

This uncommon becoming, looking back:  
*Worlds*.

Stay in the forever looking,  
The river bends like a lover's body stopping

To pick up a stone. The word is *divide*.  
The brush, held with an open palm

Falls.