

# *Idyll of Split Season*

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## *Yes You Can*

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You can say anything.  
Poetry is expectation.  
Poetry is a bowl of rice grains  
you a) check for chaff; b) boil to extremes;  
c) allow to simmer before  
withdrawing the pandan leaf  
that you then toss as documentation, into  
a trashcan w/out folding like origami.

When asked, you can say anything.  
Poetry is this or that... Insights, images, sentiments,  
a recall of what has yet to happen, a wish, a dream,  
hope of love to spring or not to be discontinued,  
a winter of solace, a summer of wild greens,  
all the seasons with random kinds of moons  
and seascapes ... You can say anything. If and when  
poetry, anything can be uttered, muttered:  
lyric or prophecy.

And also as poets we stammer  
through otherwise intelligent conversation  
with lawyers and doctors, policemen  
and legislators. Even cavemen  
grunt with more resolve they so hurt the ear,  
just like swinging a club of grace notes.

## ***Dream of the Next Half (for D.)***

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On this last day of the fifth year  
since your life crossed with mine  
I try to count the skies and moons  
we've frolicked under, the flowers  
that have changed beautiful hands  
to make peace with unthinking words.

I walk around our streets at cool near-dusk  
when we're apart with a semblance of peace  
across city distance. And imagine you mayhaps  
doing the same, pacing under the quiet of trees,  
their boughs untouched by breeze or wind  
in this apparent idyll of split-season —

that intersecting moment of gentle corners,  
from lakes to seas, kitchens to bedrooms,  
lanais to beaches, tears to rapture,  
from year to year, with the wild circle  
of hope alone as the roundabout  
that may lead us to new roads

we still have to track together, whether  
in emerald isles or landscapes of temples,  
deserts of ancient ruins or towering rocks,  
parks with hungry deer that make us embrace  
laughter while our hands are sealed in prayer  
for the next blessed half of a dream's decade.

## *Kinds of Happiness*

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I am happy for the millions  
of countrymen made happy  
by the Pope's sweet visit.

One cannot begrudge  
the happiness of others,  
especially that of a multitude.

There must be a word, however,  
for that other kind of happiness —  
for not being part of a mob.

Not being among the millions  
who saw him in the moving flesh  
on his Popemobile out on the streets,

clicked cameras as he breezed by,  
and can then claim that we were there,  
we actually saw the Vicar of Christ,

next thing to God, even just from behind.  
Why, we still saw him wave. Or better yet,  
smile, since he faced us where we were, as throng.

Or were actually with him — again, by the millions —  
at an open Mass on a field of collective faith.  
Or the thousands who can say they kissed his ring,

or brought his hand to their foreheads, in the rain.  
Or the hundreds of children and aged and disabled  
whom he bussed or patted on the side of our heads,

accepted or exchanged gifts with us.  
Why, I was only part of tens of millions  
who watched constant proceedings on TV,

but thrilled as well to the happiness of sight,  
of being in the moment, one with the moment  
historic for serving such happiness to so many.

Ah, that word in the void must be irony,  
neither black nor white, neither presence  
nor absence of sentiment born of tradition

and our parents' obeisance. Ah, that word  
in the void must be acceptance, of a flux  
of sentiments awhirl with rationality.

Ah, that word in the void must be simultaneity,  
the bilocation of heart merged with mind.  
Happy for the happiness of a crowd.

Happy for the unique heathen happiness  
of being out of it, but only to a blessed extent.  
Happy both ways, all ways. Thanks to the Pope,

and all the cameras capturing a continuum  
of rites songs prayers tears love frenzy and  
happy faces. Faithless, I too was made happy.

## ***What Else But Such***

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What else can I say that hasn't been said  
on these reckless killings and the recent dead?

Too many, yes, beyond measure of great dread.  
An eye for an eye, cry those who are hungry

for more lives to waste, pay for lives already lost —  
voices irredeemably angry at greater cost.

While there are those who call for further strength  
to eke out at length the process of calm resolve,

still hopeful that a final peace can absolve  
the piecemeal quiet of individual graves.

Such slaves to family now only honor memory  
of martyrs felled by an odd, sorrowful sorcery.

How else may I grieve in the wake of blame  
or the spite drawn deeper in whose name

we share or dispute the rage of the game?  
Such realities of our sad, mad republic

must yet undergo more fission before fusion  
with faltering dreams of unity. So tragic

the terror must remain for centuries infernal —  
to mourn such hate, such loss, such shame.

Some days we approach a grief so familiar  
it beckons us closer by our errant nickname.

Johnny! Not Juan. But of the same imperial  
thence fratricidal fate. Of the same cross.

And now the lunar anguish of the crescent.  
To claim it's heaven-sent repeats the sorry dross.

What else can be said when so many have spoken,  
so quickly beholden to the heat of the moment?

Such and so. Such and so. Here and there we go.  
Yet stay at the crosshairs of so much we don't know.

## ***Performance Artist (for Trix)***

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Scissors shearing her lush hair  
or disembowelling a teddy bear.

Why, it's a performance lady  
getting a rise from viewers' comforts.  
She's in a zone between zigzag and zymurgy,  
afflicting the calm and collected  
stances of staid or curious watchers.

Woe woe to their ways of semblance  
to lives conflicted as in the stop and go,  
cum distilled pauses, of the everyday.

White ash, black ash rain on her slow  
seductive parade of senses visual, aural,  
tactile, textural — as gestures drawn  
from the known world past frontiers of grace.

Why, she's a performance artist  
betroted to contours of edgework,  
straightening up everyone's expectations  
till they turn jejune, jagged beyond naiveté.

Cans of paint dye pour onto her pate  
and bodice, raising questions as to distance  
from chaste observance of the powder room.

She's a lady of signal performances,  
waving semaphore pennants spelling penance  
for what is common and ordinary.

For only in measured, token grotesquerie  
may an audience find the pulse of cautionary  
excitement once again. This time, this moment  
reprise the throbbing concern for malaise,  
as if we wake from diurnal disaffection  
and arch eyebrows at fantasy's march  
or is it procession, tapestry? Of the yet  
undeciphered fragments of dour dreams,  
idyllic nightmares? Lo and behold!

The performance lady is accepted  
through our own gates of turmoil,  
having given pretense of peace  
a new if wayward grammar —  
that of the unseen in daily,  
hidden duress. Until she changes dress  
and we sleep and snore again.



## ***Guitar at Sea***

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Joey Ayala had a guitar  
donated to our soldiers  
stationed on the rusting  
hulk of a ship that had run  
aground on Panatag Shoal  
in what is our musical territory  
in the South China Sea, that  
we now call West Philippine Sea.

The guitar made it safely  
past a Chinese communist  
ship seeking to harass  
and block off smaller  
Philippine democratic vessels  
that venture to resupply  
the incredible stationary hulk.

Democracy has its elusive  
harmonious notes that can evade  
the bleat of large trombones, when  
frets and strings reach the shallows.

The communists could only  
watch across the weary waters  
as the wrapped guitar was handed  
to our detachment of marines.

Our flag was raised on deck  
while suppliers and supplied  
stood erect if besieged, snappily  
saluting the serene sky, as  
the bullyboy mainlanders  
peered through binocs  
Made in China, possibly  
in sweatshops, while  
picking their rude noses.

Then our soldiers with  
browner and flatter ones  
snorted and grinned  
as they broke the boxes  
open, to revel in revelation  
of fresh packets of noodles  
Made in Malabon, off Manila,  
and sardine cans that simulated  
the old tight divide between  
Portugal and Mother Spain.

The guitar was also released  
from its packaging that came  
with the hearts of tuneful  
friends of Joey Ayala, he who  
had dared play our anthem  
a better way than how our  
hand-me-down democratic laws  
mandated. And got away with it,

Joey did, for he was idol and icon  
of generations that love his music —  
folk rock ethnic, thumping with love  
of country, forests, rivers, monkey-eating  
eagles. Or ballads redolent with the sweet-  
sour spices of passion, absence, longing.

One soldier picked up the guitar  
and strummed in the noonday sun.  
He sang and his fellow uniforms  
out so long at sea sang along with him.  
They became very joyous, knowing  
their circle of fifths with six strings  
had pulled a fast one on a nine-dash line  
of not-so-inscrutable imagination.

On the larger, modern ship  
that refused to run aground,  
the watchers grew bored, failing  
to hear any pentatonic scale,  
only tiresome orders from Beijing.

South or west of whichever sea,  
music with the gift of guitar  
should sometime heal  
the siege of silence between  
sometime friends and ships.