

FOUR POEMS

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About the Author

Mikael de Lara Co graduated from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2003 with a BS in Environmental Science. He now works in government. *What Passes for Answers*, his first book of poetry, was published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press in 2013.

Elegy

Praise the brief and quiet
ends of things that punctuate
creation, the lilt of a sentence
dispersing into breeze, a leaf
spiraling to ground, asking,
Is it over? Is that all? Then why
does the canopy refuse to descend?
A bough shivers and I think,
perhaps it is not mortality we fear,
but the solitude it entails.
A fruit punctures a river, sinks,
and as the ripples reach the banks
the fruit becomes mere afterthought,
is rendered casualty to dissolution.
How many seeds does it take
to create a forest? Perhaps only one.
The first. Birthing root and limb
from wound. Dying
to rename the seasons.

War Chant

Because thirst is common. Because once a goblet was left to gather rainwater and you were forced to drink so finally the visions disappeared. Because there are scabs, because there is the memory of scabs, there is always monsoon shrieking through the rusty steel contraption outside your window, useless now and bound to be dismantled. In the dream the man shackled and kneeling. You, behind him with a cudgel in one hand and a shovel in the other. There is nothing familiar about the hunkering trees, nothing familiar about the mud. When you were a child you would drip wax over your boils, believing it hardens the pus. It didn't. Soon enough you became privy to the gradations of pain, learned to sate the violent, nameless hungers of your predatory self. Devour this now. Fall. Say, no blunter force than gravity, say I am an animal, howling and wingless. Say, these bones can never be content inside this body so watch me shieldless, trembling, feral. Blood moon above and the expectant detritus underneath, and in the dream, beyond the haze, ruins. A patch of wet leaves, a war chant swelling in the distance. A sky, teeming with spears.

Kneel

All summer we yearned for water.
Wet blankets billowed
on their taut wires as leaves
rasped against naked statues.
Blood caked like mud on the backs
of penitents, their brows pierced
by spirals of thorns. They plodded
through the heat only to drown
when the gathering seas
returned. Oh how we pay for our sins:
Christening our storms as we would
our own children, then watching
from higher ground as they shatter
our windows and fill our paddies
with corpses. The seasons turn,
the clouds gain weight, the trees
lean away from the coastline,
steady themselves with trembling,
evergreen hands. A priest stares
at the gray horizon and gathers his flock
on a hill. We will feed ourselves
with faith, he says. We will make
this storm kneel before our resolve.
Now let us pray.

Gravity

*Tell me the truth.
Tell it to me beautifully.
Try not to fail.*

Wings can only be so heavy.
Moths are mostly misunderstood.
Stasis is sometimes mistaken for fragility.
The weather happens.
From time to time the monsoon
lays its hands on asphalt and sparrows
cower under awnings.
Still there are too few moons to get by.
All water in this city empties into the bay.
What is water yesterday
should be water today but isn't.
Snow is water lent weight by a memory of ground.
I borrow more things than I give back.
Confession is easy.
It is in the hidden that we persist.
During the war my grandfather buried
a stash of rifles in the backyard.
This is true because spoken over his grave.
There is a lack of detritus in this visible world.
Truth is the film of dust
that settles atop leaves and glistens
when observed from a particular angle.
Some trees are much taller than others.
This tree is different
from the one you see in your mind.
I would like to open a window
and not think of flight.
Plummeting is sometimes construed as failure,
but always it means return.
I wish more creatures had evolved wings.
I had a friend who believed in horses.
Once there was a house
and beside the house was a stable
and that is where my grandfather
met my grandmother.

She was the daughter of the man
who cleaned the stables.
I would like to have been borne
of ancestors who once held swords.
There is today a lack of edges.
I own two knives. My wife tells me
I smell of coconuts and rice cakes.
I believe I smell of gunpowder.
Sometimes limbs are severed from bodies,
and always bodies severed from souls.
Souls may be true. Souls may be not true.
There is of course talk that the soul is water
cradled by the basin of the body
and thus sinking is an act
of both cruelty and grace.
I dream sometimes of muzzles
pointed at the sky.
I dream sometimes of kites
and I am the string tethered to a wrist.
Gravity is a consequence of mass,
which is itself a product of collapse.
I dream sometimes of falling.
I am grateful when I wake.