FOR HE IS THE NECESSARY LOCUS

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About the Author
B.B.P. Hosmillo is a Southeast Asianist queer poet from the Philippines where he is teaching English. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in Toe Good Poetry, The Ilanot Review, Crab Fat Literary Magazine, Assaracus, and many others. Honors include Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations, and research fellowships/scholarships from the Japan Foundation, National University of Singapore, and the Republic of Indonesia. Author of The Essential Ruin (forthcoming), he is guest poetry editor at Cha: An Asian Literary Journal, a publication based in Hong Kong.
Then he took the Book of Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.”
—— Exodus 24:7

2

You’re still in the Bible, it’s Exodus, and you’re planning to escape the servitude after sending your firstborn son to school. The plan is simple: to get the paradise or the golden staircase or the garden a radiant student of death was thinking in the subway as if it’s the destination. You remember it’s in his eyes such goodness hid, something that attracted you to be a student too. You remember something talking to you in silence like when a secret forbids argumentation. That’s it. That has nothing to do with language. You remember it was that something telling you what a woman’s body can’t make clear. If you hold your wife right now, she will slide from you like a bar of soap to the edge of the bathroom. She will bleed, she will hold your insoluble dirt in suspension, she will never clean your mess. Draw out your clay bones from her hands if you believe they’re yours.

Meanwhile, your son is taking down notes on the circumstances of fear, a bear-shaped candy inside his mouth. In front of him is a cage, greasy and stiff with rust. Inside the cage, two black rats you brought for his project. You can see how they lick their balls shaped like a bullet or peanut. You can see how they look back at you in brief curiosity. You can see their difference: one has black eyes like all the rats you’ve seen; the other’s are red corundum, and therefore fierce and lethal. Both eyes are heavy and crystalline. Both eyes look down upon the floor, the sawdust. Your son wants to see them fight: hell in a cell. Because he couldn’t believe the sweetness that moves slowly all over his mouth unless there’s blood to see. He thinks if he puts the disfigured candy inside his mouth to the center of the cage, the rats will show what they want and don’t want from each other. It’s what you put in the cage that makes it inescapable and it takes a lot of time to have one of the rats, or both, dead. This is how your escape begins: your
son unconsciously is waiting to see death, the candy’s gone, a female voice is calling you outside, and the rats have fallen asleep. You can move along. What are you thinking? You can move along.

3

From a tropical sauna room past a bear deboning a chicken that is not a chicken you’re opening a bottle of beer, you’re still in the Bible, it’s Exodus, and nothing is firing you up—all the things you see belong to the past, the kinged clockwork which is the timelessness of someone who said I am about to die. Stop playing me. If you can just detonate a bomb, you will. But you haven’t found what you want, you don’t have a bomb, what you have can’t quite give the kind of death you want: a wife begging the kitchen to be a kitchen. This means she’s looking for onions before she wipes her tears. You remember your wife beginning a song with love as the title. Don’t break it! your hand landed on one side of your son’s face. If he felt your bitter sadness, he didn’t say it. He stopped cutting the meshed wires of the cage, gazed at your beer, the froth inside, its half-emptiness. You remember again, but this time, something you can commit to: droves of circumcised men almost submerged in an imagined bathtub, too expensive to be real. How without pretense you smiled at them as if you wanted more cracks in your butt, the long, climbing foot pad marks of Tokay geckos who believed they were humans. How you took one of them to a better bathtub—your lap where bodies should drown or have drowned and kept wanting to be mislaid. When you ended planting your teeth around his neck, he asked you to take his neck home, to varnish it with bright poinsettia petals, a remembrance of some sort. Because a neck like that wouldn’t really last. This neck specially has no way of holding my ashen head altogether, he said. What’s wrong with that neck? A cracked bonsai pot it was, a place of breakage, and in its bottom your seeds. You could say it was a garden you made for yourself, which was, that time, a burning bush. How your penis made
fire that did not burn up. How your penis disguised where it went into.

4

Your wife and your intelligent son left you. Give me a week or a month, she said, or anything you don’t want from me. The point of their absence revives anything present, anything with a heart. You’re still in your house, 170 square meters in another world. There’s a Bible near the piano, it’s closed, the supposed train talk is unheard.

A man five years behind you is not behind you, he’s looking at a replica of Da Vinci’s L’Ultima Cena, searching for the touch he will not get from anybody among the twelve apostles, and with your hands belting his waist he’s muting Christ’s announcement. Suddenly, the rats are making a high shrill sound. One is jumping while the other is pretending as the sawdust. You can’t identify which rat is responsible for the noise; their eyes are all closed. You got honey? he asks after finishing the beer near the cage, the bitterness in it can’t be described. It’s what you give that provides definition, and if it’s not love, it is still love. Give me honey. Give that to me. So you take him outside, you let him unbutton your checkered polo, and you’re happy he’s kissing your cheeks your wife has never seen that young. He’s laughing, he doesn’t stop laughing, then he’s kneeling as if he’s getting weak while you’re getting the beehive hanging below one of the branches of the tree you’re climbing. This is what you want! Tell me this is what you want! Just imagine how sweet this will later be!

Can you see him running away and faster than the bees? Can you not notice the stings in your arms, chest, in your face even if they’re real? Can you get him for the honey? And can you hear the rats—their sound a train running off the intersection rail? Taken over by the performative of customary sorrow, you’re a witness to a non-happening. Suicide imagines you hanged without its obligatory rope. In the aftermath of collapse, you’re the only one awake and walking. You’re still out-
side, you’re thinking what time it is from the time you never said goodbye. Your intelligent son somewhere sitting on a sheave is looking at the sun, counting minutes and series of stratocumulus all in rat form. *How are those rats doing now? How are they in my ugly cage?* Like a candle, your son goes out; he has counted, asked enough. Then, it is dark. In your opinion, is it dark?

5

You thought of it again: in the Bible, somebody named John said *I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.* If God only asked John to relay it, was God that weak to not be with you and tell you *now you’re not alone*? God was not John, but God acted like John, he was promising. So you’re calling your wife to open the Bible, to make the promise happen again, and it’s the paradise, it’s the golden staircase, it’s the garden in it that’s worth remembering. Your wife, nearly ninety degrees bent, is singing again, her yo-yo face a few inches above the casserole, slightly disappearing in the cloud of hot steam from a simmering tomato soup. Love is somewhere in the song, her body is somewhere too, it doesn’t belong to her, and it’s Exodus again. If you ask her who sharpens the teeth of melancholy, it’s the question that makes her stay, you will see her unknot the apron from her waist and use it to cover her head around like a woman about to be beheaded, like a provincial that has accepted famine in advance. Holding his breath and the dawn of innocence, your son is thinking if tomatoes continue growing if they’re already made into a soup you don’t want to eat. And if there really is something good about cooking tomatoes. *Quiet! Rats are sleeping...*he says. *Just be quiet, please... If they wake up, what food will you give them?* Your wife looks at you. You look at the floor. The floor: it has no fault in its eyes.
You see the figure as a princess tired after getting lost in the garden of John—a boy sitting on the toilet bowl its bottom a cream of blood. You can kill the boy for not being John, for taking the bees to his mouth. The boy is not a princess, but his fingers are delicate like threads in a pink baby sock. The boy is not a princess, but he’s asking you to tie him down so you tie him down. The boy is not a princess, but he’s telling you he’s a hostage and you’re the ransom. You have everything I’m looking for in a man, he says. This means pinchers with stronger wedge-shaped cuneiform in their fingers are on a manhunt for you, and one or two fingers could be John’s. So you’re counting again, so you’re looking for him again, for John who doesn’t act like a princess. It’s only in a bathhouse where you get this kind of hope, this kind of freedom to select as if there were boxes in front you and you can tick any box, you can even put yourself inside every box if you dare. A man with an awl-pierced currant nipple is smiling at you. Another is waiting for you to smile back. Someone is giving you a sachet so you will smile at him. Everybody becomes submerged in an imagined bathtub, all circumcised, all looking comfortable, all drowning in laughter. You know the prompt, you know how to give a hand to one whose drowning you want to be the author of. Hi John, you say. Where have you been all those years? you want to ask, but you can’t—he’s kissing you. John is here and he’s not here. You want to talk, you want to open your eyes, but John is here, John is sprinting for the bees you should give him, and it’s not part of the prompt that you will not.

If Exodus gives a history of many plagues, you’re sure the future is John—the eye, the windowsill, the better song. If Exodus gives the language of exile, the language spoken to destroy, the language of God, you’re sure John is talking to you. She’s not waking up. I gave her frogs. I gave her gnats. I gave her flies. She never cried.
I ate the frogs. I ate the gnats. I ate the flies. She never feared. She's not really waking up. She's forever lost, let's say, but she asked me to tell you to clean me up. Use this soap. I like this soap. The bathtub is ready. I tried calling your son, but his phone is dead, he is dead. I'm here anyway. Can you see me? I'm circumcised like you. I'm getting into what you want. I promise, believe me, my back is an emptied swamp that welcomes you.

After dark, your son invents some ways for his rats to get away although he likes the cage and he likes the rats to be there. After dark but still in it, you ask your son to do the things you can't do yourself, you ask your son to walk through the desert you have no feet in like a long drive in which he carries you, his face to your legs, his face to your face, his face against the wall you put a mirror on to see your face. No, you don't see any face, you see the empty bed behind, a galaxy of dead bees. After dark but still wanting it, you ask him to kill the rats. After seeing how the rats love each other, how can somebody get them killed? It’s your turn, he suggests. Make them fight for me. Let me see them fight first. Let me see them struggle, too.

After dark and not knowing it, your son asks you to play the piano beside a little furniture which is the Bible—it is what works for the coming dust, and hopelessly. So you look at the empty piano, you invent the pianist, you listen to his song and it's promising, how the chords summarize what you remember, how the chords begin with the pianist's fingers and ends with you. John is far removed from here but your son doesn’t hear any song or any wrong chord or a flat voice he can laugh at or anything that he hasn't seen function for his sake yet. So he thinks of playing the piano, he goes to the bathroom to wash his hands dirtied by rat semen, he gets the soap, turns the water on, splash and splash and splash and splash—O how your son can make a flood.
After dark and coming again for it, you’re looking for your son in a bathtub—seven boys in it, sliding from each other’s soapy skin like eels shocked by their own electric volt. You know the prompt: six of these boys will only get a good look at the prow of your middle finger. You know the prompt: John is one among the seven. You know the prompt: all boys are smiling at you, all boys think you have everything they’re looking for. You know the prompt: the paradise, the golden staircase, the garden where you will stand in regret or where you are just regretting how the future is not that mysterious. You know the prompt: a boy is going to kiss you, a boy is going to feel like a princess, a boy is going to be locked up defeated like an unclaimed stolen animal. It’s Exodus and you’re thinking that if you divide the boys evenly into two walls the way the Red Sea was parted by God there’d be a dry part in the place you’re to cross briskly and then you’d see your son standing on end. But this is not a mythical abyss, this is a bathhouse where every son who gets in is a lover, this is the vérité premise within which you are borderless, unknown so you may ask who will give the promising to you the way you understand it, the way beyond the family, the way beyond life. Sure you can call a boy here your son, you can call everyone here your son, but like God, you can only act like a father. And being a father, you know the prompt: you can flush all seven boys, you can reject them, you can kill them over and over again, you can love them forever, you can butt their heads through a dark corner, and you can say you are not doing anything wrong. It’s Exodus and there are many exiles here, but that’s not the necessary locus. A boy is helping you close your eyes, a boy rattling below you like a rat trampled by its cage, he is the necessary locus and he is not your son. Make a new prompt. Now say you’re just like my son, like my firstborn. Bend. Let me father you.
You’re a firstborn and so you have a rat. Play with it however uncomfortable it is with you, in your house that is by default its cage. Your father is gone, he’s probably not coming back before the night jerks off. Your mother is gone too; she died when you were born, she didn’t explain for how long. But everything turns okay because your friend brings another rat to your house as promised a few days ago. Two rats, two boys, and a two-dimensional house—this composes a lack, a depthless ground or so when one of the boys says you’re my bottom and I’m heartless. Isn’t it boring that you’re hiding your heart like rats do? So you play a game, you have two rats: pretend that one rat is alien to another, and whichever rat gets to cut the tail of the other gets its owner conquered. You don’t see yourself serving him so you get what you deserve: you’re finding him and he’s giving you a ratchet to his heart. You turn off the lights, he strikes a matchbox, the house becomes a humble candle. You turn on the faucet, he begins the fictive adventure song, the rats jump to the jungle run. If God is great, he must hear the head-butts, the shadow kicks, the turbid rats coming close to each other, the drops of water against the sink and the floor then the mouths of all those hemmed in by affirming thirst. He’s saying I’m not a rat, he’s smiling, you can still see in his teeth and the crease that surrounds his eyes that he’s smiling as if he actually wants to be a rat. Hi rat, you pretend a rat is not alien to you, I’m cutting you, you’re grinding invisible meat in your mouth. If he has a tail, you know where to find it. Here is the garden in which soiled roots come to you unashamedly. Here he is, shooting out hyssops from his mouth and the scent of mint zips you covered with transitive tongue. Here is the love of playing a game and here he is, again and again, slanting against a dark corner and becoming the only thing sounding in it and you’re climbing the oily staircase springing out from the dark and you’re biting the cleats, the cleats in his spine, they don’t break, his spine trusts that your weight is not as heavy as heaven when it galumphs across the ground, he’s that hard, he’s that golden, but you are cutting him and you’re getting
tired so here is the fountain. Drink the stinking water if you can, and you can stay here forever if you want to. But the cut part—will you take it? Touch me here, he’s saying, you know he’s saying something and something else. There’s, after all, the lyrical in darkness when you’re involved in it. If it’s not love, it’s the associative, the adhesive traction that glues you to him. It’s not supposed to overload your mind. It’s not supposed to fill beyond capacity. It’s not supposed to be your conflict, but it is your conflict and there’s nothing more natural than that.

By now, wherever you are is half a candle, a semicolon, a coordinate to what you don’t expect. Some parts of your friend are unobservable, you have forgotten the real rats, but you are still in the game. Oh how your body grows fast; by now it’s a typhoon door facing another door which is invisible, which acts like an exhaust drawing off the age of your innocence, which is an important vacuum because there you put all the things that matter to you. Here he is, one more time, and rollicking in front of you, echoing like a shout in far distance. It’s absolute, you can hear a voice because you’re asking yourself, but can you see the cut part? Can you see its energy? It’s not your friend, he’s not amazing, he would have not given up his penis had he been given a choice, he’s just in love with you. But the cut part is what you need to think about, it’s where you rise like a traction drawn to a skeletal nebula. You can see the dust. You can see the space, the death of bees taking place there the way guide stars disappear without telling you some things you would have wanted to know. You can see the bones, how they spin out for you. But where is his heart here? Will you not try a touch? Is it not your privilege?

Hang on. Another game overlaps yours, and it is broader. The real door opens. It’s your father or he doesn’t want to be or it’s God or it’s somebody who wants to give you not a room of your own but a house for everyone, a stereoscopy, a three-dimensional earth. Take the damnable slap of your firstborn life, you cannot run away from it. Here is the Bible, the great ballast. Here is
the Bible, the great escape in it. Now get your Exodus, get your little boy, get John or whatever heavenly creature saying *touch me here* for he is the necessary locus, the kind of person who is not a real person, and who wears a hole in his face breathing out the exact shape of God when he finishes a war. If you’re alive, remember the cut part—that you have yet to touch.