

Gémino H. Abad Literary Awards for Poetry and for Literary Criticism Awardees

Jonathan Peter Llanita

LESSONS IN GRIEF

Maya

Today I shot a maya
in the middle of her song
with a tone the size of her head.
What a lovely thing she was,
framed between my slingshot.
She fell with a mute thud.
Her neck had torn,
brown feathers blended
with the dead forest floor.
She slept with a shattered head
Her children sang out to her.
Would they live? –
or die? She did not stir.
I picked up another stone, the
afternoon was getting late.

Sunday Summer Mornings

I learned to love singing from the way
she seemed so happy with a mic.
Sunday mornings I'd be roused by her voice
as she hummed and danced to songs on the radio.
She'd waltz in the living room,
eyes closed, hands on a ghost from her past,
the beams of morning light passing through
the curtains dancing to the sway of her hair.
It would be years later before her hair grew gray
And later still for her eyes to give way
to the passing of age. I still hear her
when I play her favourite songs. Louder still
when I have drunk myself into a courage
to sing. The soft anger in a voice
telling me I have made her sad. A gentle hum
to silence all the other noises in my head.
A prevailing tempest tempered to a summer breeze.

Watches

I have seen my father angry only once –
it was a still face of hot glowing iron,
Eyes pointed like a knife.
It was a flick to the ear
So quick I thought it would be painless,
The swell and heat comin late,
a mute thunder to the sharp lightning
pulsing from the side of my face
In that moment I felt myself shrink
into a cold dense fist.
The curl of my hair and bronze of my skin
were not my only inheritance.
What fire he kept to raise me
I can still feel in the things he has left.
I no longer wear the metal watch he gave me,
yet I keep it close to me,
the ticking hands telling me the hours
he has been gone.

Dragonflies and Frogs

When I was ten I played near ponds.
We chased the dragonflies and the frogs,
The small nimble things always faster.
always faster than I could ever run.

I have scraped my knees and elbows
in my clumsy effort to hold them.
Afternoons wasted wading and waiting
near banks with steady eagerness.

My feeble hands reaching into the pool,
hoping I could bring them home to my father,
to feel his large hand pat my head
and nod as he ruffles my hair.

Now, I stand in front of his overgrown grave
in hand, a bouquet of soft white tulips and a candle.
I bury what's left of him in me once more.
like I have done so many times before.

An Elegy For Our House

Built of wood and steel and concrete,
Between a restless sea and a hill of stone.
Its pillars stood like broken bones.
I look upon the sea and find a seat.

My heart it slows, my face it hardens.
There, the kitchen where Mama used to cook.
The ocean whispers everything it took –
the cottage, my room, the garden.

I pace around the place my Mother
sat me down with a downcast face,
“Some things aren’t easily replaced.”
I feel her hug and I feel it smother.

The sun falls behind the empty hill,
the sapphire sky melding with the topaz dusk.
I have so many questions left to ask,
but the evening air has begun to chill.

I muster heart to sit and stay
until I find the words I need to say.