

Edgar B. Maranan

Where the Flowers Have Gone
& Other Poems



Where the Flowers Have Gone

Two years, and our daughters would be gaunt,
mere flesh and bone and baggy eyes, yet they are all
we have. We would put ourselves where they are
now, if they'd come running to our trembling doors.

But the wind is torture upon this stretch of field,
ears pick up a stream of curses from absent troops,
that drunken laughter. At all hours, the sun exacts
pained beads of sweat on those who dig up earth,
dousing for life's traces, even tendrils of hope.

Two years, and our daughters, one with child,
set off among the peasants of the fields to dirty
their feet, cleanse their minds, fresh out of school
where songs and dreams made grass blades dance

a new world opened beyond the leaves of books

There was a camp here, the men who pitched
their tents and dug foxholes were peasant boys
some years ago—they could've been our children,

too—flying kites, picking spiders off tree branches
for one-on-one death bouts on sticks, or teasing
girls who could someday become their wives.

Two years, and then we hear how they had fared
while caged, like starlings with broken wings,
their feathers plucked and bloodied, their beaks
silenced even for pleas, and still we could hear them.

Strange how words carve horror round the heart:
the commander's name, his triangles and suns
promoted to stars, while he dug more graves
without so much as flowers to hide the scars,
or grief: the many names that spill off lips
while the heart knows they now exist apart
from the faces interred in undiscovered pits.

We may remember these assassins as innocents
once, as having fragile dreams, frail bodies, knowing
only play, the fields of fun. *They slew small things*

they whip-cut stems and flowers, they brought down
lives with slings or pellets, they feasted on jokes
that had to do with treasures borne by girls.

*By fate, by choice, were all these mere child's play,
or a soldier's genes, an inbred code of cruelty?*

Two years, and bits of blackened bones show up,
some shredded cloth. Only the earth is dead certain
when it speaks to us, *Here there were children.*

New Year's Eve

1

Feverish at midwinter. Nothing, nothing but fog
of sadness, ten thousand miles from home.
There, carols warm up nights, paper lanterns
foreground December's brilliant stars.

Years hence, I shut out the powder smoke
of celebration. Deaf to the demon-chasing bombs,
I long for the brittle pop of crackers long ago.
Carolers amidst cold pine air warmed up
lungs as, out of tune, they jingled fuzzy lyrics
for a pittance, right up to Three Kings' night.

2

Hours before the parting of the years,
I take a ride downtown to Intramuros,
past Commonwealth straddled by the slums
where windows flutter with wind-whipped rags
and hand-down clothes, the week's washing
in public taps, the spawn in joyless frolic.
The walled city is a ghost town where robes
and epaulets ruled, their spirits living on
in showcase mansions and museums,
in retro diners and curio stops, all closed today.
Would they have closed that day a black-clad
figure faced the morning sky, his back to a brace
of muskets, his face towards the rising sun?

3

Calesas idle on the cobblestone, till one rumbles
past me, its crap catcher swinging behind the horse,
the driver all alone, homeward with not much fare
today. Tricycles rankle, cold, unwanted, on their
sidewalk ranks. I see one with children cramped
inside the cab, the driver retching on the bars,
zigzagging in his course. I stride past tattooed
men, bare-chested, in grimy cut-offs, fetus-sleeping
on cardboard mats.

Athwart façades, a *sari-sari* stand displays a wealth
of tins and styrofoam, spirit shelves of rum beer gin
and Coke, a brandy for just one day of wages
plus fireworks on the sly: so many ways to cheer
the parting of the years, or part unhappy souls
from lives grown old upon such native ground.

4

I meet a man at the Luneta, not far from where
the hero stands with overcoat, the bullet holes unseen,
only his aura of nationhood serene, the pride of race.
He holds a book more potent than sacred writ.
But the other man holds a stick with twiggy hands,
rousing what nourishment for his flesh remains
among the rubbish on this hallowed land.

5

On Quiapo bridge, a hologram of humanity
crouches on the bridge's rise, holding forth
an opaque plastic can, his lower body draped
with a piece of rag and stiffened shroud, as from
beneath him flows a stench mark of earthly spot.
With tangled hair, a face begrimed with dust,
he mumbles for the plink of outstretched love.

6

Rockets, voices greet the parting of the years
then everything is spent. Explosions taper off,
sputter, pick up again for a minute or two,
are taken over by the tired tooting of feathered
trumpets, the final banging of empty cans

Somewhere are louder blasts we cannot hear
men of good and evil lose not only limbs
while the god of time sets back to zero
our hoary human dreams.

Holy wood Lovers

*'In any stretch of highway, you would come across a convoy of trucks
bearing logs, stout majestic logs, all illegal, all with permission from
the powers.'*

Have we not uses for this lovely wilderness,
why must old spirits be sole dwellers in the woods?
These rough-hewn wonders are the stuff of whims.

We mark our places well. Here shall we gather
the textured wood, mahogany brown and thick
with annulars, spectral of pith, layered of strength.

Here shall we truss up the boles of ages
that we can turn into forts of solitude
with parquets shining before the hearths.

Geometries define where we eat, make love
and sleep, secure within, and a wonder of design
when seen on the pages of our lifestyle tomes:

frames for misty panes through which we dream
pillars to build our bunks and bookshelves on
armchairs and sofas that mimic the warm womb

beams holding up roofs like reassuring arms
dark battens bracing against all storms
latticework for providing accent and shade

boards for sundecks and sunken dens
rafters to hold up our angles of the sky
stairwells, balconies, and panoramic terraces

from which we shall have all nature to declaim.



The Life and Times of a Seditious Poet

We shall line them up against the wall!

—attributed to JMS, UP basement canteen, ca. 1960,
but could be apocryphal

Not for him the contemplation of coconuts,
virgin or otherwise, succulent to tongue and teeth,
but the bitter crop of tales from his country
of broken peasants and rebel hunters.

Not for him pink raisins but the rose
that bleeds in thriving on thorny bush,
not for him blue monks but the bluer
mounts standing sentry to the plains.



He still dreams of the pole star to the north,
a lantern that lit up his path through forests
and fields, but as the world turns, celestials
happen to spin off in their own selfish orbits

and it's come to pass the old dragon gods
make monkeys out of us, they fiddle up
their island lackeys who have grown fat
from the barrel, the larder and the vat.

In far exile, his poems and hymns still excite
trilling like bird song, moving like the wind
stirring up old ashes of departure, the phoenix
if you will, and in our sleep, we hear him sing:

“Ay! we’ll line them up against the righteous wall
draw blood from their soul if they have one at all
and the millions will rise above this weary pall
of feudal order, the peace of a gray eternal fall.”