



Ned Parfan \FROM *EPISTLES*

Crispin

That was gravity, my love.
And then the boy swung back
up the belfry.

Rope-clung, wind-stroked,
up and down the thrill and the torment
of the crazy bell's peeling—
a call to worship.

Worship as the pleasure
in the making,
the sound waking up the town
as his body's doing. His voice,
his scream, brazen, solemn.

When the men who accused him of theft
and tortured him to death

left his body in the dark, my love,
I heard his lifetime
echoing back into him,



POETRY

all the years returning
like a ripple in reverse, a force so powerful
it pulled prayers back from the sky.

To take your voice with you
as you go—
this is how death must take away,
silence and stillness
as engines of our erasure.

Now you don't hear it—
lump in the throat,
ghost in the tower.

Or was that him, my love?
That howl, that thunder?



The Death of Don Rafael Ibarra, Subversive and Heretic

It is Black Saturday, my love.

On television, Kuya Kim has arranged
for himself to be tied to a cross,
in his signature safari costume,
his usually strident, infomercial voice
weighed down by his surrendering. In this episode
he discusses the possible causes
of Christ's death. Severe blood loss, asphyxia.

On the cross next to his
is a man who must think he looks like Jesus,
clothed with a rag like Jesus, tied and nailed to his cross.
And the third man on a cross is playing the part
of Dimas, or Hestas—whoever's supposed to be
on the right side of Jesus.

All of it, recreated: men flagellate
themselves into town, else someone else
brandishes the wretched whip
as crosses bruise their shoulders, dragging velvet robes
on the scorched, dusty road.

All of it, recreated. Except the dying part.
Right. Let's see them rise from the dead.





I heard, my love, that when Don Rafael was dying
in prison, the ghosts congregated around him
for his last full show, watching the air
rippling from the clanging
of chains, from the bell bouncing from earth
to sky. They were watching for that once-in-a-lifetime
dying breath.

“The last heretic breath?”
the first ghost was said to have asked.
“Was the heresy just hearsay?”

“It was decided that it wasn’t,”
the second allegedly answered,
“so maybe we should just go with that.”

“Wait, he isn’t dying of natural causes,”
the third said supposedly. “And clearly
this isn’t murder, nor an accident.”

And a voice from nowhere,
listening to the gossip, declared:
“He is to be harvested by Death himself.”

Now lie me down, my love. We will recreate
this scene. I’m feeling a little heretic,
and I’m supposed to be dying.
And you are the crazy bell
I thought I heard in a dream.





Tasio

It's all unconditional.
To say we were spared
would acknowledge a consciousness,
a control room
above the clouds—

a Pilot in the cockpit in the eye
of the storm.

Look up, my love: the sky is always
the first to heal. The islands swept
under it. Signs of former lives
return to shore

changed. A toothpaste sachet, proof.
A piece of wood, house. A rubber tire,
roof. A naked doll, hands.

Tasio says as creation, man
is contingent
and not necessary. You, love,
need not exist.

Not even this old woman
on the news,
who says she kept praying
for God to “stop the storm.” Her ego



is a child
who wants to cross,
and her God's a traffic constable
who wouldn't raise
the stop sign.

I am sorry for the inconvenience,
my child. There's a point to all
suffering, there's a reason for everything.

I envy her, my love.
She must truly believe in a listener,
her faith a warm blanket
against irrelevance.

"What do you want?"
Asked the Philosopher
before he ran into the storm.
"Justice? Divine Purity?"

What I want, my love, is to touch the pure
divinity of numbers, order,
to catch the symmetry
of a dragonfly in my hands
and find the chaos,

to hear the song and sing the noise,

to run out screaming,
to taste the storm.



Todos los Santos

When I die, my love,
I want my heart to squeeze itself out
of its cage, and float into space
like an abandoned Russian space station.

Another version of my heart
might as well end up as a chamber
for bionic spiders, silken
with synthetic cobwebs, the holes

cleaned of clot. Or it might end up like the rest
of Don Rafael's flesh, his heart torn apart
by mouths and mouths of fish,
in the river where his body was thrown,

soon after it was exhumed
by the dark, hunched figures
who left it to drift in the middle
of a storm. So that when his enemies

drink the water and eat the fish
from that river, his crumbs become
parts of them, as tracking devices
for his ghost.