

The background of the top section is a black and white sketch of several human faces, rendered in a loose, expressive style with visible pencil or charcoal lines. The faces are partially obscured by the text box.

Abstract

Experiencing a pandemic in the Philippines is in itself a result of a deeper systematic ailment that has plagued this country for years, and in this current administration, the remedy to both illnesses is becoming more and more like a pipedream. This small suite of poems tries to versify this experience, particularly how most of our choices during this health crisis are burdened by the economic, political, social, and even environmental impacts caused by policies, laws, or guidelines reflect little understanding of people's welfare. In short, many of us are (still) bound to suffer(ing), with or without COVID-19.

Keywords

Overseas
Filipino
worker,
financial
crisis, health,
environment,
state policy

FACES / PHASES AND OTHER POEMS

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FACES / PHASES

In this country, in every
uncertain step, each day
is always a chance at
coming (face / phase)
to (face / phase) with our
maker, even if blessed
with one less period
of struggle to deal with:
corn coffee, healthy lungs,
good sleep after good
harvest. Still there is no
surprise seeing one long
(face / phase) in the streets,
in congregations, in screens
that speak of promise
and prejudice in cycles.
Are we truly ever
done with this sad, sad
(face / phase) when this
mirror says otherwise,
when this chapter has yet
to spill its intentions?
Where do we go from here?
What do we want in the
(face / phase) of all that is
painfully familiar and green
in its greed and gruesomeness?
In our lives' latest episode,
a (face / phase) is a
(face / phase) until it is not.
The point is we take
off this (face / phase)
to put on another
(face / phase). That is
the way of survival,
or so we are told.

BEFORE THE FLIGHT TO AL KHOBAR

Al Khobar, you said, is where you're going.
To nurse people other than your own, to wing it.
City of merchants and oil, of shops where
mirage can be sold in clear ornate bottles.
As long as you are bold enough to see it.
You know the world is still one careless sneeze
away from annihilation but this leaving
is a necessity. This can be good for us,
you said. I believe I've heard of this before
but only with a different city, another country.
Without the burden of the end of everything.
Was it Trondheim? Or a suburb in New Zealand?
I forgot and it took me close to a decade to do
just that and several thousand miles worthy
of evasions from an old beau I could circle the Earth
over twice. Thrice if you count the days I've learned
of another rendition of letting go: ice shelf breaking,
slipper by the shore, a president's pledge slipping
into obscurity. It takes much effort, you see,
this thing about echoes, calibrated distances
with words our only measurements of attention.
I will miss flying with you, long walks,
the surprise of birds that cast shadows
like the shade of great trees. And I do not want
to mistake another bird as just another bird
that darts out of nowhere to anywhere,
free of baggage. Because it is a shame
to not remark on its wingspan, sculpt of beak,
unique feather gloss. The way light would pull
the colors out of every barb and filament.
So stay put for a second, fly into my arms before
the desert takes you. Be the bird in this story.

MARGINALIA ON THE FIRST DRAFT OF AMENDED GUIDELINES

This is normal.

Mobility is for the gods.

Look for rats in the gutter.

Operate with utmost obedience.

Obliterate when needed.

A wing clipped is a choice unmade.

A sacrifice we make is a sacrifice for all.

Believe: Money. Money. More money.

Shields? Batons? Water cannons? Guns?

Lachrymator agent as if not enough tears were shed.

The idea is to be invulnerable.

Do not get sick. Do not get shot. Get your second shot.

Do not question the trigger.

Line of beauty in the line of duty.

Resistance is not a remedy to the cause.

Contain all forms of defiance. Contain the sun.

Expect ghosts to sing their songs in the streets.

Handwashing: Keep their hands free.

Their words are their cuffs.

We will get through this with an applause.

Still, masks and masked—face, numbers, truth.

Is it okay to breathe freely?