

## Lamentations

Perhaps all this was to awaken us to shapes  
of suffering: the bruise encircling  
a nurse's mouth as she peels off her mask.  
Malls sparkling expectantly for no one.  
The migrants who built them huddled  
shoulder to shoulder on backs of trucks  
—all this we allowed to go past us  
without second glance.

All this, we only began to see  
when we were made to stand a metre apart:  
a woman amid laden grocery carts  
cradling a bag of rice because all you need  
for porridge is water. A security guard  
falls asleep on his feet, then dreams  
of his daughter across the closed border.  
She wobbles on a stool, lathers her small hands  
with suds—*I love you. Don't be sick.*  
*I love you again*—her voice wanders

through lonely cities once thronged  
with people. Death distends, numbers  
lose their weight. At home, statistics split  
workers' dorms from the rest of us.  
Our comfort feels like shame at first,  
then swells into an unsettling need  
for change. We must find the cracks  
where light comes through, then prise  
them wider. On Sunday, a taxi driver muses  
to his only passenger: *How beautiful*  
*the empty roads, now we see more clearly*  
*the trees.* I finally hear something

shaped like praise. Each morning,  
there is a moment before anything  
bad happens—I see this as promise.  
Each morning, the dark side of our planet  
curves towards a certain sun. I call this grace.

## Love Letters

This is how we will love each other—  
our fluid forms girdled into embrace.  
We will encircle the emptiness  
between us. Turn inside out, expose  
ridges of braille beneath our skin.

You will map my secret contours  
on your body. Hold me in headlock,  
as my face moulds to the warm alcove  
of your cheek. Between us, we will find  
a brightness that funnels out into years,

decades, the sum of us both. We will  
savour it, relish it. Turn into ourselves,  
wrapped tight like a scroll. Turn till we  
brittle, from the strength of embrace—  
this is how we might break each other.

NOTE: *Kuih Kapit* (Malay) or “love letters” are scroll-shaped snacks made by clasping egg batter in a hot iron mould on a charcoal stove. If the round wafer is rolled more than a split second after being removed from the heat, it crumbles.

## Sunny

*On May 18, 1965, Sunny Ang was convicted of killing his girlfriend Jenny Cheok so he could collect on her insurance. She had gone missing after a dive trip with him. Only a single flipper worn by her was found—severed cleanly at the top and bottom.*

I remember your hands  
strapping me to the tank,  
bearing its heft till you ceded  
me to water. Then your lips,

coarse as coral, snagging  
across mine. This is how you  
have always silenced me  
by softly plugging my mouth.

I sink into the sonorous cave  
of the regulator's hiss. You said,  
the key to diving was to empty  
the mind, a slow surrender

of sound and colour, your body  
possessed only by breath.  
I think of our breaths braiding  
like silk in the dark, you capsizing

me over and over, your weight  
a little death. Brackish waves  
thunder in my skull.  
A blunder of fins.

The distant sun flays  
the sea's surface. Your kiss  
a knife turned through the cage  
of my teeth. My whole life

I knew nothing but succumbing.  
When water strained to pin me  
down—this time I wrestled back.