

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.

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.