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Alphabet Soup

Amok

Raising the Dead

The Beginning of Things

Fatima Lim-Wilson

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now the mountain is giving you back
 you lie in a felled tree
 that cradles your stillborn dream
 the east my friend is not red
 and we move in endless circles of grief
 like the iron bars that enclose the grass
 that encloses the hunchbacked house
 of the living that hems us in
 over and over and over again
 a broken song holding the stubborn fact
 of your dream's implacable death

FATIMA LIM-WILSON

Alphabet Soup

(Mimicry as a Second Language)

Angel of letters, feed me.
 Beat your wings till I remember
 Cardboard cut-outs of ABC's. Why
 Does my memory hobble, lift
 Empty pails from an English castle's dark well?
 Fill me with the welter of vowels,
 Googol of consonants, tender French
 Hearts, dead Latin roots from where words grow,
 Insidiously. My tongue smokes, a
 Joss stick trailing mixed signals. What
 Keeps me from balancing a silver spoon
 Locked in my mouth? An echo.
 Mother humming her made-up melodies. She
 Nudges me to move my lips with hers.
 Old wives rustle, whisper tales in my ears.
 Palimpsest of longtailed syllables,
 Quick darting wings of a windseeking accent.
 Run, I must rend the tent of Thesaurus.
 Slash away till I warble, silvery voiced with a cut
 Tongue. I grow, a hunchback, trailing my master,
 Unctuous and anxious. Sweet, mute angel, cast your
 Veil over me to muffle my voice of broken glass.

With your flaming sword, mark me, with a bloody
X to form my lips into singing, always, a heartfelt
Yes. Spewing baubles, I become the favored one. In this
Zoo of sycophants, I'm the parrot who's almost human.

Amok

(*Amok*: In Indonesia and the Philippines, a condition of great emotional disturbance under which a person loses control and goes about killing indiscriminately)

—*Webster's New World Dictionary*

He weaves his wife's limbs
With those of her startled lover's.
His sight grows dim as the flowered
Sheets darken. His ears pound with heart's
Hooves, the hoots and footstomping
Of drinking mates who swear
They would do the same and worse.
The fat chickens fall. His child
Cocooning in his hammock and his mother
Calling out the saints and his own holy name
Slow motion into disarray, heaped toys. So, too,
The grinning neighbor and his fenceposts.
Amazingly, the knife gets lighter,
His limbs take on the grace of wings.
Blood petals into patterns, mapping
His rage up and down the street,
The hacking following the beat
Of her sandals sliding
Against the bamboo floor.
She tiptoes to hold onto him, humming,
Her waistlength hair swishing,
Awash in paper lantern light, caked blood.
He whispered the rhythm then:
"One, two, three, keep time with me,
Mahal." Just as he counts
Under his breath now, chasing after
The fading music, erratic, waltzing
With his fleeing shadow, still
Insisting, as he embraces, carves
The air, that he is in full control.

Raising the Dead

"At least 120 people died when a floating shrine sank in the Bocaue River. Police officer Sonny Pablo said those aboard the boat were singing and praying . . ."

—*Philippine News* report, July 1993

Wreath-heavy, a child's body
 Glistens in the sun, cruciform
 Among many whose limbs swell
 With significance: Last
 Breath arrested in grace,
 Still singing of Mary's
 Embrace of the broken sacrifice
 That was her son. His cross
 Sprouted from these waters.
 This they believe as firmly
 As they grip its ragged bark
 Swaying upon the shrine.
 One touch and tumors melt away
 Lost fortunes turn up in rice pots,
 And wandering husbands, remembering
 Home, break into a run.
 Just as the bleeding woman
 In that jostling crowd seared
 Christ's hem with the fervor
 Of her passing fingers,
 Their faith lightnings through
 The sacred wood. His love
 Too much to bear knocks them
 Down, down into depths of joy,
 The blue robes of an upturned sky.
 Their ears ring with their own
 Exultance. Their bodies drag new wings.

The Beginning of Things

Tonight, we make up our own legends.
As we go along, we discover
Buried treasure. Why, when
Touched, does skin raise rows
Of budding flowers, a castle,
Lightning shows? Did you hear
Of the two lovers too entwined
They made the gods so jealous
They had to spend their entire lives
Aching for each other, one turned
Into a rock, the other a bay?
Only, for a few minutes each day
With the tide could they, with rage
And mad laughter, embrace. And so,
I recall their tragedy in the midst
Of our pleasure, taking even more
Time to name and rename the sudden
Dip between the waist and hip,
The regions where lips rest most
At home. I conjure up a full
Moon, chant a forbidden word
Three times, and stir in our
Bed, a pool in whose clear water
I see our future. Kingdom
Of locked limbs, shared breath.
The answers now come flying
Like a winged horse or gold coins
Spilling from a magic purse.
Barefoot, I dance through fire.
I tower over trees. And I bring
To you, still smoking and warm,
The beggar hands of a goddess.