Prelude to a Revolution

Jose V. Clutario
Philippines

Overture

The old song plays on the radio
in my country a week
after the elections.

It is the song many of us
who studied history know.
A song laced with numbers

and lies. No, we do not sing
its malady, nor dance to fake harmony.
What desecration of a memory.

Bruises and blood in blank verse.
Meanwhile, the martyrs
of the masses, disturbed

by the chanting of their dead
torturers’ children, gather once again
on the streets, their blood wiped clean

and their names reduced to a list.
Who, then, will sing our own song again?
Those who resist? Those who listen.

The old song plays and plays louder
as bodies fall into a trance.
Quietly, a rhapsody swells in the heart

of the dissident and the weary.
The ensemble is patient, waiting
for the overture, playing without a conductor.

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Against Forgetting

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What history? You mean
the stories children hear
from the dead? There is
no memory without name,
without grave. Without body,
there is no story.

What story? You mean
the trails of blood that
you follow to the mountains
that breed sons of the enemy?

This is his story: The devil
is in the eyes of the rebel.

Lullaby

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Young girl, wake up,
your mother is away.

She left early with a basket,
she’ll be gone for a day.

Take the bag full of clothes
with mud stains and holes

Wash them clean, wring them dry.
But do not hang them –

if you try
you are dead. The sky is red.
A monster is waiting to be fed.

Little one, stay low and be quick.
Follow the river, hide for a week.

Somebody shot a woman on the street
They go after those who dare to speak.

Gather, what you can,
to survive the night –

not the clothes, but
the memories – no

the faces of those who
disappeared in the dark.

Carve their names on your
Skin – it doesn’t matter how

it feels now. Cover your
shivering shoulders. Wait

for the lamp to glow red.
The music will fill the streets,

and when your body starts
to tremble – sing! And sing well.