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.
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.