AUTOPSY OF A FLEDGLING:

Berpalingan!

POETRY BY CATDYA

Autopsy of a Fledgling: *Berpalingan!*
By Catdya

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The subtitle is from Chairil Anwar's fragment, Nocturno:

> *Pena dan penjair keduanja mati,*
> *Berpalingan!*
>
> Pen and poet both dead,
> Turned!

daun ketupat kunjung terurai
uang tunjangan sekedar lewat
kepala yang lama tak dibelai—
berpaling darinya untuk yang tersirat

leaves that will decay one day
wages come and go they say
the lonely hand that yearns and pines
lets go of love for cryptic lines

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Autopsy of a Fledgling

I. Innocence Past

Etymology

A nice man once told me that blood is thicker than water
To pull threads back hundred years long
Watching calcified lines in the sand
“Could history be folly?”
“Nay! What is folly is man!”

His fond lamentations continued till daybreak
Insists upon himself that stones speak to him
Fossilized matter frozen in time
A holy book unchanged, divine

Simplistic is he, the man stuck in the past
The capacity to view progress he lacked

Shall we reinvent the word?
Put it on its head and give it a twist
Reimagined bodies only we can give
A vessel that breathes—a vessel that lives

Sprinkle life into what was static
Watch it ebb and flow in rhythm
A newfound joy for the novel
A new foundation remodeled

Childhood Home

Soft flickers of light in the night
Blown by the updrafts
Of the high-altitude plains
Carrying with it an ethereal glow

The air that stings your skin
Over the soaked vetiver earth
While humming winds cradle you to sleep
As rain seeps into overgrown pavement

One by one, the soft light wanes
The aldehydes of youth fade
Gone too the lullabies sung
As well as the vast fields to roam in

Greeting the sun,
Blades of grass shed their dew
The star casts a different warmth
That pricks the skin even more

Stubborn Breakfast

Behold, The Egg! An icy pool!
Submerged in waters low
The membrane clings to what is dear
And so the flaws are shown

Grotesque, The Egg—it falls apart
As rich as it comes off
The mother put a lot of heart
When it was but a soft

Encased, The Egg, in one thick veil
The mother bears the brunt
When chances of rebirth prevailed
She put her image front

Egads! The Egg! In smithereens!
The fate it cannot fill;
A pressure built from others' dreams—
Now binned at neither's will

My Dreams are Wrapped in Banana Leaves

My dreams are wrapped in banana leaves
Tucked away in a lunchbox until noon appears
Next to it are my memories,
    Wrapped in corn husks for energy
Alongside a generous helping of my naivete
    Skewered through, a la *sate*

Bound together with toothpicks and grit
Carefully arranged, until high noon hits
Until then, I'll make sure nothing's missed
Only then, will I be able to stomach my guilt

Routine (Daydreaming)

Light pierces the cracks in the curtains
The futon exhales deeply
As the night owl woke by intuition

Facing the sun, she closes the blinds
Dragged herself out of bed
And dreams of catching mice

Look Back

Fragments of innocence left behind
Yellowed toys and photographs
In a now empty nest
Where memories reside

Upstairs, no longer daunting
A single body occupies the bed;
Where the days are shorter
And the couch feels smaller than before

Life of the Artist

Sketchbooks and manuscripts occupy the work desk
As they danced, with pencils and paints, in a trance
Stumbling on the dance moves
Merely spinning to the groove

You couldn’t hear the outside grey
With the bouncer in soaked clothes turning people away
Tonight, hand-in-hand, they swayed
Creating art unafraid

As the evening progressed
The erasers had their casings shed
Pencil shavings hit the floor
Drawings stacked as high as the storms would roar

The tucked away stage now a safe haven
Where meek markers could be a little brazen
Where gloom undergoes transformation
And life experiences a process of creation

Fruit Plate

The apples red, mature and fresh,
were peeled and cut to slices thin.
Upon my door, and in the flesh,
the figure, grey, reached out to give

a china plate, as frail as she,
lies tiny distant memories.
The quiet girl that lies in me
perks up at her in harmony

10 PM

The red lights retire for the day
At an intersection tinted with yellow LEDs
In the backseat, time crawls away
Radio static slips its way into my dreams

Drivers racing to reunite with their beds
Past speed bumps without any fear
All while the hums of the engine caress my head
Until one hill we went up whispered in my ear
Saying it will carry me home tonight
Tuck me in bed, and turn off the lights

Bad Habits

A candle wick through my spine
Burning through my body.
I feel alive.

I keep lighting myself on fire—
The alternative?
Freezing.

I want the sun to swallow me.
Over and over
Again.

Talent Show

As I step onto the stage something
in the audience sees me; it knows

the mask I don is no different than the smile
I wore yesterday, or the one I will wear tomorrow.

Tugging at my collar, I recall how
an anxious person acts. Perhaps it will feel

sorry for me, enough
to stop

searing its eyes into my skull.
Sweaty, mask slipping—I see it crossing its arms.

I go through the motions of a character
hoping to forget myself in the process.

Foundation and tears drip down my chin and
onto the rental costume. My facade

barely holding on,
I feel another set of eyes on me: waiting

for her turn in the
spotlight.

My Father's Coffee

One of the world's finest delicacies is coffee you didn't buy. Or rather, it's the ground coffee my father leaves out in the pantry. He buys from artisan coffee shops that love to boast notes such as "barrel-aged elderberry syrup," "Ethiopian-tempered chocolate," or "morning dew jasmine" —whatever that means. As he has gone through *my* coffee without asking, I find it acceptable to indulge myself in the occasional purloined bourgeois treat.

Unfortunately, my father also goes through milk like a fiend. He leaves milk cartons with barely a drop left in the fridge and leaves the household bereft of cold milk. How tactless! This leaves me in situations where I am forced to abandon my already-made cup and await the arrival of a new carton. That is, after I bring it to his attention.

When he goes out of town occasionally, I revel in the coffee and milk by myself. If he leaves for too long, I'd have to buy a new bag of coffee—which defeats the purpose of me nabbing his—and with my own money. I simply can't have that! He must leave just enough for me to enjoy peace, but not too long that our coffee stash depletes.

Though, often during his trips I feel a sense of emptiness. We are the only two people in the household to drink coffee regularly. I have no one else to talk to about coffee, how a fresh batch of beans exude an earthy and bright aroma at the same time, how certain blends mingle in flavor, how sometimes notes overstay their welcome on the palate, how steamed milk tastes like clouds on a warm afternoon—who else in my family gets it? What is the use of coffee if not to spark a conversation?

It's not like it's the end of the world when we run out of milk, or that time when he absentmindedly finished off *my* bag of coffee. He *did* end up replacing it with a new one. For all his faults, he taught me how to make coffee and appreciate it as an art.

I just wish he would put a new milk carton in the fridge after he finishes one.

Divination

From whispers shared in solace
To omens all alone
Read far beneath the surface
By stars or cards or bone

Make out the shapes—a story!
A sigh, a gasp, a groan
There is no need to hurry
Enjoy the great unknown!

Crossing A Bridge

A klaxon snaps me back into reality. I've been
climbing these stairs for a while, not sure when
it will end. The crossing is above a railroad
you see. It must be built above the cables—but
four flights of stairs?

Still, I persist. My steps thud against the metal,
punctuated by creaking unbecoming of a healthy
structure. Daring pedestrians may opt to skip
the stairs entirely and walk through traffic
and the railroads, dodging incoming
cars and the dread of knowing a train car is 50
tons of death for anyone unfortunate enough
to get hit by one.

The stairs are neverending. Corroded metal
reminds me of blood, and subsequently, death.
It doesn't help that government funds aren't enough
for upkeep on these bridges.

Truthfully, I hate crossing this bridge.
I wish I could walk across the railroads
like all the other people I've seen on foot.
I wish I didn't have to take the bus across
the street in the first place. I wish I didn't live
in this city to begin with. I wish I was
a completely different person.

II. Devotion Present

I'm Used to Unsweetened Tea

Chamomile floral and breakfast dark
Sugar for some is crucial in part
The way the notes linger oh so bittersweet
Paired with conversation for an afternoon treat

You taste so much better without all the frills
For some the sweet honey is worth all the thrill
Is it a tad selfish to treat you as mine?
A perfect concoction of needles and pine

Tisanes and blends unorthodox, does
It make any difference if plain is enough?
You're craving the candied that I cannot give
A lonely lodged granule that's stuck in the sieve

A World Apart

There's smudged lipstick on the altar
Where unspoken sacrifices are made
Sweat stains on the carpet where one falters
And forehead oils leaving fibers to fade

Lips that tint the cup with forbidden words
Asking for a faith ill-gotten
And begs God for an entire world
Of muffled memories best forgotten

Following the motions of a prayer
For heathens, they're
Folded over like a paper crane
Peppered kisses that contain the profane

Bound to confessions that slipped out of place
Destined to be no more than a chase
Worldly possessions does not a man make
But what I'd do to intertwine our fates

An Adorned Bag

Keychains holding onto dear life
Their rusted hardware frail and folly
Rustling along each rhythmic stride
Doomed as ornaments only

Scratched-up acrylic comforts the wearer
Weathered and worn the efforts of time
Collections, obsessions, wane and falter
Will leave marks even through decline

Juliet

For Van

O, Juliet, my princess-met, on lookout for a dear
Your Romeo, he comes and goes, and now he's but a
jeer
A jest of sorts who failed to court a true gem glistening
As he laments the incidents, lend nary a good ear!

Across the land, you've found a hand, to hold you —
promising
Your prince now new, your one to two, together
wandering
Alone as I, your friend hereby, true love I dare not scoff!
If he believes your heart's to leave I'll chew his head right
off!

Acetone

Peeling off vestigial layers of a nail bed
To remove a temporary gift—
She loses more than what she gives

Setting fire to the senses
The liquid reeks as it shoots up the body
Stripping chemical bonds after chemical bonds

Skin arid to the touch,
It saturates the organ wholly
Turning it into leather slowly

When the bottle is closed
Her fingerprints are different than before
She looks at herself— such is the life of glamour

The Uncreation of Man

Dunk my head into a vat of boiling oil
Watch my skin bubble and split apart
As my pores are filled with fiery heat
And each follicle melts away into meat

When my hair is dipped into the pot
Split ends fuse together into clay
The same that affronted the Devil
Reverting back to an empty vessel

After all my imperfections are reduced
Into little more than carbon matter
There'll be no mortal form to preen
No more flaws to be seen

Poetry in my Mother Tongue

Rhyming is easy in my mother tongue
Each word enveloped in circumfixes, predictable
While possessives latch onto the object, a syllable—
Closing in distance between the two

Shall I call you my dear?
Or should I use *sayangku*?
As close as we could be, orthographically
As close as you could be to the most vulnerable parts of me

Would it be cliche to write a poem with you repeating?
Kekasihku, *cintaku*— As lovers do, yearning?
To pepper you into every noun for beloved
A language created from conflicts bloodied
The grammar embedded in my youth endures
A native bias, an intrinsic allure

A certain cadence, a rhythmic bounce
To show you off, the rules I flout
Rhyming is easy if I have you, *duniaku*,
Turning the world into something new

"*-ku*" is a suffix denoting something that is "mine." *Sayangku*, *kekasihku*, and *cintaku* are all variants for "my dear," while "*duniaku*" means "my world."

Waking Aid

Daybreak comes as the birds come chirping
A cup of coffee to keep me sane and working
They rise effortlessly, pecking at the worms
All while I’m stuck here, stomach churning

Caffeine-induced days come and go
While the feathered flock needs no warning
Crowds follow their itinerary with glee
Continuing to live with or without me

The outcast of the fleet mumbles tirelessly
The moon my companion, my beloved evening
Forgoing the cup is to forgo what day brings
Maybe it’s worth it to not sleep in

CSW

Rubber tires. Gasoline. The smells of dust and industry. Sky-high roads and frogs and toads and earth that smells like evergreen. Up above the bus lanes go. Bustling cities down below. Ecosystems so persistent and other cycles we don’t know.

Life and death and in between. Creatures made up of routines. From dust to dust in God we trust to pull us out from the machine. Machinations old and new. So little time, so much to do. If I were younger, of innate wonder, I wonder what more I would do?

Mother Nature

Fresh blades dig into teak flesh
Unearthing an effigy within it
Ripples from waves beyond time
Lapping at the figure gently

The body contorts around the knife
As She takes on an earthly form
Breathing through the dense pores—
A liquid smothers over Her

Suffocating behind the lacquer
She becomes entombed
Unable to close off the cycle
She watches others rot

With Teeth

Bite into my head gently
Tell me what it tastes like

Do you taste salty tears,
Or perhaps sweet dreams?

If you press your tongue
To the roof of your mouth

You might make something out—
Passions taking shape

Will your palate pick something up,
Or will I bleed in vain?

I can drink coffee again

Not without heartburn, but I take the risk anyway. I slowly sip a V60-made cup mixed with half heavy cream and half milk; the former nearing its expiration, clumped together as I poured it into my mug.

It's been a week since I paused caffeine. A week since my eyelids became heavy at the sight of any screen, since my head felt weighted enough to drop into the ocean; a week since I've started staring at tasks, hoping they'll resolve themselves. My body had sunk into sheets for days at a time, burying myself in daydreams.

Now I get to drink the bitter concoction again. My heart can't contain itself. Bursting at the seams, my vessel barely holding itself together. Blood pumps into every extremity. The mountain of work wastes away into a mere lump. Eyes bloodshot as I try to catch up with everything I've abandoned while I was being reduced to stone.

When I lie awake at night, from the poor decisions I've made today, my stomach will slowly heal itself from the scars I've inflicted. At least, that's what I think happens. Between my gut and God I can never tell what's happening. Nevertheless, I would have exhausted myself for the day, but I would remind myself it's worth it, since I can drink coffee again.

Drought

Siphoning moisture from the body—
a heat, bringing forth feverish visions
of figures out of reach

Stood next to you, withholding
droplets of devotion;
your bodies merely phasing through

Unquenched,
your mirage leads me astray
and I sink deeper into the sun

III. Judgement Future

Reflection

Streaky polish and split edge hair
Always close but never quite there
Hear my pleas for identity unbound
Hailing for change nowhere to be found

Optics untethered, I pray for escape
Change comes so soon, no longer I wait
Smudged black mascara with one coat of tears
One day I'll have to go and face my fears

The Memories of a Body

Capsules scrape the lining of my throat
They itch and lodge themselves between the folds
Of flesh and skin, borne of what sin?
Do I dislodge myself from within?

Unwilling I spit it back out
Acid pools around my doubts
Inside myself I have trouble finding
The crux of the problem undefining

Waiting to be dissolved by time acidic
A mere patient masochistic
My skin burns within self-inflicted
Scars unseen holding secrets

Will the body finally betray its master?
One day, shall it falter?
Stories encoded through bile and blood
How do we know if it's had enough?

Crashing On Land

It starts with a sudden wave of heat
crashing into your body
Red-tipped and flushed,
tides of blood spread to the extremities
A feverish daze, a world lawless
The warmth permeates the skull
as the world pauses

Rapid blinks and frantic glances
Losing balance
as your body weight betrays itself
Surroundings turn into vignettes
Holding onto anything
and hoping it connects

Thoughts scattered by the breeze
The pit of your stomach
turns into an abyss
Endlessly falling
with no surface to hit
Already feeble legs cease to exist

Vision turns murky,
untrustworthy
Acid consumes the throat lining
An ocean of stimuli,
a rip tide of senses
A tidal pool of memories waiting to waste away

A Midnight Undertaking

Reeking of rust and tarnished alloy
The bat skulks out its lair
Echoes jolted awake
The fleet and their mates

The evening appears
As a cloak woven from dreams
Deception and desperation
Tread the night with caution

Moving mountains and diverting rivers
Swarmed the flock ‘round a never-ending task
Through clarity of the stars
And with the moon ajar

Spirits be damned
As they danced around the ark
Waiting for the sun to rise
Giving way for it to be capsized

By the Vanity

Fingers dipped in gold mica
Bandana wrapped around her head
Brushes tapping away at a palette
With each flick, particles of her shed

Stroke after stroke,
Her skin is buffed away
Airbrushed to the heavens
While her doubts are here to stay

Over a lavish mask
She sprays to set and last
Through all the layers she’s put on
You can still see the cracks

Corndog by the Road

The tarp trembles at the presence of thunder
as the burner flames embrace the wok.
Oil bubbles with joy with each morsel dipped
into the liquid, creating a delicacy fit

for a king. The gloom stretched over the realm;
children weave themselves in and out of the rain
while others sought shelter in stores,
waiting for a time ‘till the storm stops to pour

on the measly tarp holding onto rainwater.
It pools over our heads, and the flames.
Waiting for the crisp golden brown,
to savor it before the city drowns.

Domesticity

Singed by what the bleach imparts
The same way onion stings
Fragile hair now breaks apart
The same sheds onion skin

Coatings, fragile, stripped away
Constructing something new
A fraught ideal, in a way
Regardless if it's true

Everything now hurts to me
To be someone I'm not
Curse the day I have to live
The very life I fought

Iron Maiden

Embedded in red and raw skin
An iron mask is searing in
Of clay and mud, of man and djinn
My flesh reeks of a mortal sin

Transform the Self if it exists
Disguising it if it persists
A cloak of dreams that barely fits
I yearn for feelings out of reach

Pry off the mask embedded in
Pray for acceptance from my kin
Will I do what I say I preach?
Or will I simply cease to live?

Will You Be There?

Once my words belong to the wind
And my name’s no more than a chirp
Between sparrows perched on twigs
While roots start to unfurl

As time ceases to be time
The lines of myself blur
Was it a legacy I left behind,
Or a mere remnant of the old world?

Unheard Of

Mycelian dreams bring visions of sound
A tree hits soft, mossy earth
Between leaves, ‘neath stones unfound
Bark lichened, a death—or birth

Steeped Memories

Grounds left to dry;
Leaves, bitter lies
Part lips, swiftly
Cut roots—decry

An acrid disposition
Seeds uncommon ground
Clean palate, clear throat;
Keep no virulence around

Inevitable

Some dust-soaked fingertips
And yellowed photographs
Tall stacks of documents
An extra pair of hands

Referrals unrenewed
Two ancient wardrobes bare
The grief, in brief, consumes
Still, paperwork prevails

Extras

Travel Log

The City of a Thousand Suns

Across the sugar factory
Eastbound on the road
Grazing the industrial shore
Towards heroes of old

The blazing sun resides
Where intercontinental winds blow
Two guardians watch over the city
As high tides approach

The Quest for *Tahu Bulat*

Wherefore art thou oh *tahu* man, purveyor of the spheres
Your on-the-move type attitude is causing so much drear!

I search for you from far and wide but still you're nowhere near
I wish to purchase all your wares if only you were here
You show when I turn back around as if it isn't queer
That creaky two-wheeled stall of yours avoids me so I fear

Perhaps 'tis riches that you seek that's halting you from me
If you just rest you sure can bet I'll visit frequently
I do not grasp why one's own task does not have staying put
I do not want nor 'ppreciate the goose chase done afoot!

This Poem was not Sponsored by the Surabaya Bus Company

As strong as the gusts of wind hitting the windshield
The *kenek* always has one foot rooted on deck
Quickly moving while keeping his balance in check

As idle chatter oils up the machine
He ping-pongs around as the bus is his field
A ticketing machine on legs, on wheels

*A *kenek* is an on-bus ticket inspector and guide. It comes from the Dutch word meaning “servant” and is sometimes translated into English as “assistant” ”helper” or “conductor.”

KM 62

Felines forage for scraps
left by tired travellers
seeking brief respite

As the sun sets,
headlights pierce though
the gentle raindrops

Carrying cattle,
trucks tower over
small sedans

Inhaling the damp air,
the bulls search
for a purpose

In transit for a sacrifice
unknown to them

Afternoon Commute back from a Convention

The sun is tinted teal and blue
Through windows on a bus
The air is humid, cooling too
Relieving midday rush

A tension in the muscles brew
From all the mess and fuss
Two days have gone and so will you
So live your life for once!

Experiments

A series of experiments in form and structure

The Word

Yet it's easy to mix up *pantun* with pantoum
The same way metaphors mingle with each other
Dancing around the spoken word in steel-toed boots
The Divine lives among, through, and as Language

The same way metaphors mingle with each other
Angels at the mixer make small talk
The Divine lives among, through, and as Language
Each whispered breath containing its own world

Angels at the mixer make small talk
Between them stories of mortal men are passed around
Each whispered breath containing its own world
As Gabriel exclaims, *Read!*

Between them stories of mortal men are passed around
Dancing around the spoken word in steel-toed boots
As Gabriel exclaims, *Read!*
Yet it's easy to mix up *pantun* with pantoum

Haiku #2

nails; hammers. sewing
likened to the grotesque act
of driving a car

Last Poem

I, Catdya, of sound mind and under no duress, do hereby make, publish, and declare this as my last Poem, hereby revoking all prior Poems.

I. MY ARTWORK

I devise and bequeath my artwork—written, drawn, crafted or otherwise—to the ever-waning collective memory. Upon my death, any works published or unpublished will be set free into the aether to live amongst other works of its kind.

II. MY BODY

In the event of an uneventful death, I direct my body be returned to the earth, becoming one with the ur-Adam. Otherwise, I further direct my next of kin allow the coroner to excavate any inkling of justice left from my vessel before being returned.

III. THE INTERNET

My digital ghost shall be expunged from all search engines one year postmortem, leaving only the aforementioned collective memory. If my beneficiaries wish to do so, they may keep a digital shrine containing prized memories stored in a physical USB drive. Preferably this device be integrated into a kitschy necklace of some sort.

IV. MY LEGACY

To my friends and family, I bequeath the burdening knowledge of my passing as well as the fleeting richness that is life. I request my beneficiaries read one of my poems at the wake—letting the awkward pauses between each line break take up space—to then later go home and compose sappy, eccentric poetry of their own.

jalan pintas / shortcut

teh hambar tertinggal tidur tadi malam. tulisan tak tuntas
tergeletak begitu saja. kompas di atas kertas berputar
tak karuan; kutub-kutub mengabur.

kata-kata yang kutulis—entah
sekedar gagasan atau naskah siap cetak—kelak mengacaukan
jarum kecilnya.

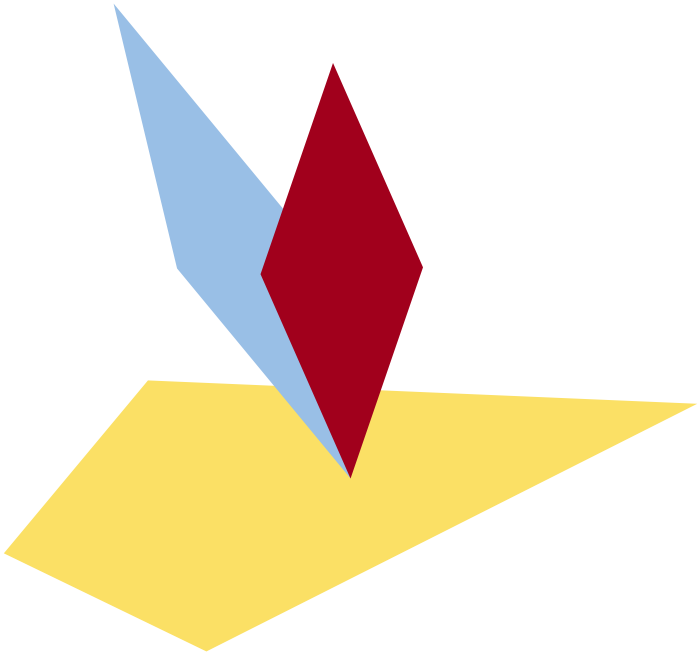
konon kompas dipetunjukkan para penyair. menentukan
kiblat agar tak keliru mana yang tepat dan
sesat. polaris, ketara, kerap menjadi patokan
para pembaca.

***

stale tea left from last night. texts unfinished,
scattered. the compass on the notebook spins
wildly; poles blurring together.

my written work—whether
first drafts or finished manuscripts—fling
the fine needle into a frenzy.

it is said that compasses corral a scribe's
wild thoughts. pointing t'wards roads worth walking; away from
winding paths. polaris, repeatedly, postures
as the readers' map.

end.

Catdya is a writer and artist with too many hobbies. Find her at catdya.com