

When You Love, Paper Burns

Thomas Leonard Shaw

Once upon a time the Sun and the Moon were married, and they had many children who were the stars. The Sun was very fond of his children, but whenever he tried to embrace any of them, he was so hot that he burned them up. This made the Moon so angry that finally she forbade him to touch them again, and he was greatly grieved.

- *The Sun and the Moon*¹

I.

The pain was love,
that to receive love was to be pained.

Know that I am the child of a man who loves
a little too physically, a little too roughly,

who is a little too easy with the hands, a little too daring
with his feet. Without the softness of rain,

or the reason of wind, his love given
without restraint. The tragedy is that love is mine,

but I do not want it. Maybe father will understand
one day that I fear what he calls love.

When You Love, Paper Burns

II.

Forgive me for I am sorry

I was a little too quiet

about his warmth.

What I understood before

darkness

was the hand swerving through air.

What I knew in between

blows

was that I have faltered.

By the time you will hold me,

Mother,

know that I now understand why

not all who love can be

forgiven.

I say this firm with the knowledge

that I will never be able to

myself. Forgive me that my quiet

pre-empts the end of your silence.

When You Love, Paper Burns

III.

What can be done

Is done.

What can be burned

Is burned.

What can be buried

Is buried.

What can be remembered

Is remembered

What can be forgiven

Is not forgiven.

What is forgiven

Is not forgotten.

What is forgotten

Is a cosmos beginning collapse.

Note

¹ "The Sun and the Moon," in *Philippine Folk Tales*, ed. Mabel Cook Cole (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1916). <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12814/12814-h/12814-h.htm>

When You Love, Paper Burns

Bionote

Thomas Leonard Shaw is a queer, liminal poet-theorist, and a faculty member at the Department of English and Comparative Literature, UP Diliman. He was a poetry fellow at the 1st Philippine National LGBTQ Writers' Workshop, the 1st Cebu Young Writers Studio, the 59th Silliman University National Writers' Workshop, and a panelist for the Cebu Writers' Workshop. Thomas has been published in several different countries. He is also a poetry and critical essay editor for the *Katitikan Literary Journal*.