

The Country Poem

(in which lines can be read in any order)

Lakan Ma. Mg. D. Umali

Did the news report mention the girl liked nineties sitcoms and regularly fought misogynists?
The country does not know its white-haired owners.
Perhaps what we need, says the analyst, are more open markets.
I lost our love beside a river with changing names. I cannot pinpoint the hour of loss.
Days bleed into one another.
The settlers were hungry, so they were promised chicken lugaw at the celebration rally.
Dear sky, forgive us for what you've seen.
This is the nth operation deemed "one time, big time."
My mother asks me to return before midnight, and we don't argue anymore.
Farmers remember her with fondness.
Inside the tomb, there is nature decomposing the abstraction. Inside the tomb, the subject.
The displaced were told to refuse the relief goods.
If you had seen her on the street, you would have wanted to shield her from smoke and rain.
The community has to imagine itself more intensely.
Northern countries know us as a former colony, hotbed of insurgency, wellspring of cheap labor.
Trees sway their dissent.
And blessed is the fruit of your womb, the dreaming child.
In the middle of our grief, we report web pages posting uncensored photos of the encounter.
She did it for love. She did it because she had a beautiful mind.
Oh country, what have these men done? Your mountains, your waters, your forests, I cry for you.
No more, please.

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Cursed be the land that kills its children. May its leaders be turned away forever from solace.

I love her. I did not know her. But I love her.

Bionote

Lakan Umali studies and teaches at UP Diliman. Her work has been published in *SOFTBLOW*, *Likhaan: The Journal of Contemporary Philippine Literature*, and *Kritika Kultura*. She was given an honorable mention at the first Kokoy F. Guevara Poetry Competition, and received first place in the English category of the 2017 Maningning Miclat Trilingual Poetry Awards.