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Story Sketch

“Tidal Wave” begins in Oahu, on whose exuberant shore has landed Thomas, a middle-aged Singaporean in the throes of a personal crisis. Thomas checks in at a small puce-coloured hotel in Waikiki. That first evening is spent at a nearby Mexican restaurant and bar. He keeps to himself, eats little and drinks with dogged abandon.

The next day, Thomas is entranced by a random view of the gutted mountain at Diamond Head. On impulse, he sets out by bus to the national parks. He climbs the Koʻolau trails while contemplating life: his childhood in Queenstown; the best friend who vanished from his life; his catatonic father; his broken marriage and the trajectory of his days. But the story he keeps coming back to and the event affecting all others, is that of his mother’s sudden unexplained death in his teens.

Thomas recalls his first year in Japan where he met the lovely Tomomi. He remembers an incident, something that started out as innocent mischief but which nearly sabotaged their wedding. He cannot help thinking that that it somehow foreshadowed what later came to pass.

Thomas returns to the hotel after four days. Inside him he carries the mountains’ brilliant and ruthless beauty. He hears about a disaster that occurred many miles away. The ground shifts under his feet, the tide turns and he is awash with a pointless longing. As yet, he is senseless of all that will soon come home to him, the tragedy of too much patience.

I Sing the Galactic (Star-gazing in Hawaii)

In the pitch dark
in the murky depths
in the frigid harrowed clasp of night
birth-stones recur in smithereens.

Look up at the darkling sky.
How to read the divine presence,
how to map this glistening pour
of ice and fire?

All we can do
is keep on singing.
Over this earth, this sacramental sphere
we pilgrim.
We are all of us star-crossed voyagers,
escaping by degrees,
eternally at sea.

Discursions (Eunos, Singapore)

On a train winding to the enclosure of the west
where they say everything must one day end,
the dubious sounds of the city crowd in each time
the doors open: shoes shuffle in, out, make no mind
of their misdeeds or of common grace, phones beep
while a girl thumbs the dark blue fringe of her shawl.
Your lips shape the name of the station stop just before
the doors decline your exit without so much as a qualm.
You glimpse the lights palpitate above the platform seats.
Now we pass fields where, in the ebb of evening, children
flee into that good night. What Love enacts such pictures
in a story written for our sake, discards the drafts
still unread and recalls them the very next day,
makes all our promises for a debt no one can pay?

The Long and Short of It

(The only land snake to be found in the wild in the volcanic islands of Hawaii is the tiny blind snake. It is thought to have arrived in plant soil brought from the Philippines in 1929 to landscape local school grounds.)

Serpentine,
dirt-churned
and convoluted,
every sense attuned
to higher ground,
this coiled parable
makes no small crossing
of time and distance
through swamp-shrub
and tree,
a band of shadow
amongst hesitant rock
and grassy blades.
Waits for just
the right time to lift and vine
out of reach
of shade and wall;
signifies all
kinds of comings and
goings, gleamings,
grasping ground
which does not belong
(this no mean feat);
or does movement
only have meaning
when one has
a home
to return to?