

# 3 (three) Poems

By Tzy Jiun Tan

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry editor Hezekiah writes: Tzy Jiun Tan is a profound paradox of the first order, I adore her work. She writes beautifully. I confess I quote my favourite lines to pique your interest. It is not necessary here but still irresistible. "The infant came gushing in two pumps, screaming like a power generator." How's this to delight perversities of all natures: "my work-weary lover / tends to the sighing / mushrooms," Sounds like secret-agent-code doesn't it? And the response from his mirror counterpart confirming his identity "my linen skirt flutters / against my blown glass womb." If I had to choose, her last work might be my most favoured: ' uncharted territory' is a masterpiece "...her eyes dead like frozen peas."*

## No man's land

*Modern women rely too much on doctors, my grandmother said. In her time, women birthed in their homes. She was scrubbing bedsheets against the washboard when the contractions started. Labour was a woman's affair, so she sent her husband out with a long list of groceries. Her handwriting listed the items at random. Like a map, the list would bring him from a grocery store from the north side of the town to a hardware shop down south. The family bicycle had broken down. He would be on foot for a long time. My hailstorm of a grandmother boiled water, sharpened the scissors, and bit down a rag. The infant came gushing in two pumps, screaming like a power generator. When the father came home complaining about the heat, he found his fresh son cooing in the crib, his wife tilling the soil under the jackfruit tree.*

kitchen, 1968

my work-weary lover  
tends to the sighing  
mushrooms,  
whose umber canopies ripen  
in his buttery hands,  
still moist from bark.  
rising, rising, to

grace. it has been two weeks, since  
the accident at a worksite  
declared ten dead, three injured,  
twenty-five illegal,  
twenty thousand on strike.  
the city halted to pluck  
helicopters  
out of the sky.

my linen skirt flutters  
against my blown glass womb.

I shatter a plate.  
third time this week.

my egg yolk lover  
quivers with laugh,  
grabs my wrist  
till it turns pale  
against the dusk.

tomorrow, we will  
wake to the purple sun  
splashed all over the barricades.  
we will walk the canals that stink  
sweetly of buoyant corpses.  
we will hot wire our veins  
and chase after blue trails  
lined with smoke.

I kiss his pulsing neck. say,

*watch this prised light,*

*it holds time.*

*regard these soap-soaked hands,*

*they stir a boiling pot.*

*eat this soup,*

*for we march at daybreak.*

## unchartered territory

The television screen showed herds of cattle throwing themselves into ovens. The meat rolled out on trays in the shape of fists. Mother was hanging paper plates on the clothesline. I was eating my steak when my friend called. She got the job at the oil and gas station, said I should meet her at the new vegan restaurant overlooking some warehouses. I took the train, chewed on my lip the whole time. The joint was tiny, barely holding its dollhouse-sized chairs and waiters. *You have been eating swell*, my friend remarked, her eyes dead like frozen peas. She ordered broccoli and I chose a leg. After my fifth vegan, everyone had scattered like marbles. I ate and ate, grew to be able to touch the tip of the state building in one arm span. I broke off the east coast, floated away with little regret. By the seventh day, I was declared a continent, hailed an environmental miracle. I called and called for mother, found her reincarnated as the moon, marionetting my waters.

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *I have the attention span of a puppy. It's hard to find stuff to read that stays. Poetry that has inspired me are ones bubbling with surprises at every turn: ones that pivot to another world, ones that jump scales, ones that swivels back in the end and jabs you in your funny bone... I have found great joy in reading Bob Hicok, Fernando Pessoa, and Wislawa Szymborska. I write with the assumption that I will need to captivate my audience with images in the same way, perhaps with less finesse, but with all my tender loving care nonetheless.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Tan Tzy Jiun is a writer based in Malaysia and Austria. She graduated from New York University Abu Dhabi with a BA in History, and is currently pursuing an MA in Vienna. She is an embroidery enthusiast, photographer, and script writer.

