

Sim Sim

Time's allegro.

Sulu Sea skitters in

like fire, fern-green rolling boil,
phytoplankton gobbling red & blue, washes up
beneath these stilts,
gut-dark

glisten & suck.

Shucked oysters on ebonised beams.

Sim Sim—the water village,
summoned from the silt of a Surah, fattened now a hundred &
fifty years on fishcheek & prawn-gut,
by imams & smugglers, gillers & madames, minnows &
meth-white herons.

Sim Sim,

multifarious hardwood crab, sole-smoothed planks
a tessellated armour, thousandfold feet pincer'd to the mud, bejewelled by
bottle caps &

kretek packets, syabu straws, 10 ringgit a pop, plastic bags
braided into a mermaid's slung off wig,

Sim Sim—

crouching above sea, palpitates, vibrates,
threatens to scuttle sideways along the shoreline,
shapeshifting as it goes.

My father's village.

Can we still call it that?

That Sim Sim burned down fifty years ago,
sprang new limbs & danced around the headland,
like egret, like truant flagpoles,
to where I now stand, a stranger. And he, too.

Sulu Sea a tirade,

raging in, enkindles the dreams

of Uncles who yearn for a piece of paper, lifting sarongs to piss
through the planks, muttering Ya Allah, Astagfirullah, flicking
ciggies onto the seething sand; of Aunties who yearn for a piece of paper,
bashing in garlic heads with the pestle, promising a future they cannot
promise, singing so sweetly of yesterday ... Crack me like crab leg, the sky
sucks out my innards, erase the wrong words to find the right poem:
berjabat tangan dengan malaikat / hilang ketakutan terhadap lumpur &
ketidakpastian / pokok pokok adalah huruf abjad yang dilupakan:
shake hands with an angel / lose fear of mud & uncertainty / the trees are a

forgotten alphabet: astagaaaa, all my loves & all hatreds, all my prayers & all my failings stampede in, on variegated warhorses of saltwater & foam, molecular make-up transmuting slowly to plastic, bottles so thickly layered sometimes one cannot hear o o ocean's legato—freeflowing sea-salt keys, hammer hits the ocean floor & lava spells my nenek's misspelled name, my father, my atok, my aunties, grins riven by hustle & history—but when no one's looking, & the humans are inhumed in sleep, dreaming dreams of mullet & God, inked fingerprints & Iblis himself—the sea rises up, polymer-limbed jinn with a mask of mud——& so does Sim Sim, on raw-boned wooden stilts——they dance pangalay, a dance of offering, circling each other like great birds, soaring & pivoting, a dance of death & delivery, spiralling towards heaven in thermal updraft, toward the

infinite falling

stars,

an arpeggio of light.