A Life is Theft: a Cremation and a Birth in Singapore

for Koh Tai Ann

This time you took no chances — no flowers, no formal announcements, only the word of birth passed to those who asked, and were pledged to silence — as if this second child must be slipped past the public notice, the papers, doctors, or the claws of God.

Last time was an ambush: the Chinese rituals, the naming, the first week visits and the one-month gifts — the metaphysical publicity. The safety of all those toys and clothes! I wrote nothing then. Perhaps this now is a blessing against fire, short lives and burning toys; and mah jong players bored with other people’s grief, who wait, clicking tiles, to sweep the ashes left by mourning, in government chapels, institutional green, too empty or too full of God.

Arthur Lindley