

A Defence of Humour

Too dark, you say. *Don't take it so seriously*.
And common sense is on your side, I guess.
Lighten up, you say. *There's a funny side to everything*. And I agree with you, I really do.
Most of my days are circus, edged with irony,
at ease with postmodern multiplicities.
Like the rest, I can detach, hold competing
views, know we construct our own worlds.
And, as you say, *humour is tolerance, brings balance*. No, I haven't lost it, honest. Why,
today at the temple gate I walked past two
children begging – and afterwards went
somewhere nice for a drink, knowing
its price would have fed them for a week.
I sat in a cool pub with jokey tourists
and expats, listening to anecdotes, jotting
parodic lines to entertain the crowd at
future readings. Believe me, my days
are loaded with humour. In fact I laugh
more than most. Look – I have evidence –
a note to me from Thùy: *I love your laf*.

Yesterday, riding my bicycle at dusk
through Hanoi's old quarter – those busy
winding streets full of amusing incident –
I came upon a traffic hazard in the form
of a paralysed young man, dragging himself
along the road with his elbows, clutching
a small plastic container empty of money.
The dust choked him. People ignored him.
Or refused to see him. But – unfortunately –
he wasn't invisible to me because my front
wheel almost ran onto his poor dead feet.
I thought, since there are no services here
to help him, I'd stop and tell him a good
joke but then reminded myself there are
many millions like him in the world
and just not enough jokes to go around.

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