

# FIVE POEMS

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## Shame

*A 10-year-old boy committed suicide in Tondo, Manila after his aunt put makeup on him and posted photos on Facebook Monday afternoon. Upset, the boy went to his room and locked the door. His mother followed and knocked but received no answer. The victim's mother forced the door open and found her son hanging by a silk scarf from the doorjamb at around 1:20 p.m. The boy was in a kneeling position, with the scarf looped around his neck. –Philstar.com*

There wasn't even a moment spared  
for thinking things over. It had to be done  
quickly, urgently, like it was some drill  
learned in school. A protective measure  
for emergencies espousing the need to  
renounce panic. Duck, hold, cover  
when the earth suddenly shakes. In cases  
of fire, evade smoke at all costs. Head  
calmly out to the closest clearing for air.

And so the boy did as he deemed  
needed. In a sudden attack of bullying,  
survival instinct kicked in, sending him  
to take measures in the quiet of his  
room. And when the door was forced  
open, there it was: a betrayed 10-year-old's  
version of surviving shame. Silk and gravity  
weaponized. Death as survival came  
much quicker than the rescue of prayer.

## The Virgin

I broke it. This petal—pink and punctured  
in my palm. A piece from a posy disentangled  
by my hands. I'm a clumsy virgin on my first  
job: delivering warmth and fondness coded

in flora. If this bouquet is a message, did I just  
compromise the meaning? What if this petal  
is the word *love*? What if the point is love  
and love now is missing? Sender to receiver:

I \_\_\_\_\_ you. Is Mr. Receiver to simply  
fill in the \_\_\_\_\_? And let Mr. Sender bear  
receiver's insouciance? The code is marred.  
My negligence is to blame. I shattered love.

## Settling

When the dust settles, the quiet, too,  
perches  
on the surface, clings to it  
tightly, like a vagabond finding  
his perfect resting spot, desires  
to seep into the surface,  
takes dibs and calls it his.

Meanwhile, our hands turn restless,  
fraught  
in their need to wipe the dust  
off its claimed residence, ever aiming  
for movement, for resolve, always  
untamable, never hushed.

And then we gasp in awe at our feet,  
remarkable  
in their loyalty, walking along  
with brash obedience to the whims  
of our hands, never complaining, never  
negotiating to be still.

## Sounds of Wonder

Chirping. Children at play.

At the shore, the grazing  
of slippers against the sand.

The flops of waves communing  
with rocks. The squeaks  
of bubble wrap in your hands.

The burps of live air pockets  
squashed between fingers. Gas  
escaping restraint. Breeze  
setting still leaves into motion.

The corkscrew's whistled  
release. The assured fizz  
of virgin wine. The crackle  
of fire. The stealthy scampering  
of smoke. The turning of wood

into ash. Loved ones deep  
in slumber. The quiet of a  
dream. The secrecy of humming.  
The mystery of a gift's wrapping.  
The shattered innocence  
of a gift's unwrapping. An idea  
perching on the mind. The gliding  
of pen on paper. The [kiss](#)  
of fingers on the keyboard.  
The cracking of ice. The whimsy  
of water. The fiery murmurs  
of words. The exhalations  
of grief. The sweet lull  
of your lover's valved voice.

## Notes on Clouds

*Notice the clouds:*

They turn resplendent  
only with the help of the stars' glisten  
or the sun's shine. How they rely on  
something else for a taste of the spotlight.

*Notice resplendence:*

How we long for it  
only when the gloom proves too much.  
What is there to say about gloom? That  
it is a cloud that has finally lost its steam.

*Notice gratitude:*

How we often savor it  
only in the context of failure and loss.  
Don't we fail and lose too much? How then  
to explain ingratitude?

*Notice loss:*