TOMÁS

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The Journal of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies

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Definitive Voices in the Local and International Literary Scene

Augusto Antonio A. Aguila

he revival of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies (UST CCWLS) in 2011 saw the promise of the Pontifical University's restoration to its former glory as an institution known for its exemplary and distinctive literary tradition. It is common knowledge in local literary circles that UST has been the home of many National Artists for Literature, as well as the country's premier poets, fictionists, essayists, playwrights, and literary scholars for many decades, if not centuries.

The first step to stage this comeback was to resurrect and revitalize *Tomás*, the UST CCWLS's official literary journal. Rev. Fr. Herminio V. Dagohoy, O.P., the Rector Magnificus of the University and a true Renaissance man, said in in his inaugural address during his installation as the 96th Rector, that his immediate goal was to develop a multi-disciplinary approach to all the different disciplines. Fr. Dagohoy believes that no discipline, no matter how lucrative, must be considered so important as to lord it over the other fields of expertise which are not so financially remunerative. True to his word, the Fr. Rector indeed provided the impetus and inspiration for the literary climate in the University to become once again alive, exciting, and flourishing.

The first two issues of *Tomás* featured exclusively the works of Thomasian writers, both established and emerging voices in the literary scene, which proved that UST is indeed becoming a fertile breeding ground for writers. *Tomás* generated great interest from writers everywhere, so that in its third issue, it included contributions from well-acclaimed Filipino American writers, Cecilia Manguerra Brainard and R. Zamora Linmark. In *Tomás 4*, the latest issue of the journal, we continue to raise the bar by including the following contributions by writers, both national and international:

Tim Tomlinson's *Runaway* captures very subtly the raw power of youthful angst, the possibility and the inevitability of escaping, and that it is only a matter of time before we leave or "run away" from home to attain that fleeting prize called freedom.

Nikki Alfar, one of the finest contemporary Filipino writers of fantasy, weaves a tale about the true worth of love and loyalty in her story "The Dog, the Devil, and the King of Heaven." Using man's best friend as a metaphor for what is true and good, Alfar fashions a fable that serves as a genuine testament to the importance of ideals and age-old values, as well as to the true meaning of love.

Cyan Abad-Jugo's "The Never-Ending Island" is a haunting story about love in its simplest and purest form. Jugo creates a mythical place which, like Atlantis, was claimed by the ocean.

"Oscar" by Kat Del Rosario is a Kafkaesque story that tells in fairytale-like fashion of how greed and crass materialism can be man's greatest pitfall, and how genuine love can conquer all.

Fresh from being declared National Artist for Literature, Cirilo F. Bautista's poems powerfully conjure the beauty of everyday scenes and encounters, the anguish of memory, the patterns of suffering, the futility of war and heroism, and the unending quest for an authentic self.

The poet Rita Gadi reveals her highest aspirations and deepest yearnings concerning love, time, and memory in her suite of lyrical verses, "Ancient Love and Other Poems."

Dennis Haskell's "On the Eve and Other Poems" impeccably and exquisitely portray man's diurnal exigencies. With a sharp eye for detail, Haskell surprises and beguiles the reader with his clear vision and elegant form.

"Breakpoint and Other Poems" by Isabella Banzon immortalizes in vivid verses the problematics of misgivings, meanderings, and memory. Banzon probes into the most personal of spaces and the most hidden of desires. Eugene Gloria's new suite of poems skillfully distills, like a beautiful still life painting, snippets of everyday existence. Gloria delves deeply into our most simple yet profoundest truths.

Reme Grefalda's poems take us deep down into her musings about life's most difficult struggles, the revolt of the human spirit, a commuter's nightmare in a crowded metropolis, the pain of knowing, losing, and remembering, as well as the inevitability of death.

Finally, Rowena T. Torrevillas' series of evocative essays takes us on a fulfilling journey that speaks of simple joys which have an overwhelming and lasting impact in one's life.

Tomás 4 showcases the distinct voices of both local and foreign writers which is an indication of the journal's blossoming international presence. The next issues of *Tomás* promise to feature more important works from renowned writers abroad as well as the finest in the local scene.

Tuon sa Parikala: Isang Introduksiyon

Joselito D. Delos Reyes

aglay ng antolohiya ang panitikang nasusulat sa ating sariling wikang pumapaksa sa atin, nilalaman ang kasalukuyang tayo, ngunit habang nakatuon sa mundo, ay nagmumula naman sa ating pinakamalalalim na gunam-gunam.

Sa dulang *Sigbin* ni Chuckberry Pascual halimbawa, na may tagpo sa isang espasyo ng mobilidad na kumakatawan sa urban, ang apartment, inilalahad ang relasyong temporal bilang ugnay—o maaaring sipatin bilang kawalan nito—sa magkaibigang umiinog sa isang malaon nang paksang tigib ng lagim. Ayon sa panauhing editor na namili ng mga lahok para sa antolohiya, "Mainam [ang] paggamit ng espasyo (paupahan) at komentaryo sa kasarian at pag-ibig kaugnay ng pagka-aswang at misteryo ng mga relasyon sa mga di totoong kakilala."

Naroon ang nakamishanan nating kilabot, ngunit ang mahalaga, naroon pa rin ang tungkuling ephemeral ng mabubuting panitikan, ang lugod. Tandaan nating ang pangunahing layong ito ay siyang pintong nagpapapasok sa "bagong" mambabasa ng panitikan buhat sa popular na babasahing taglay ng Internet.

Nasa naratibong romantiko't sentimental ang gilas ng kuwentong "Kuwerdas" ni Nonon Villaruz Carandang. Mga paraang maikokonsiderang malaon nang nananahan sa ating panitikan at kultura. Kapangyarihan ng akdang tangayin tayo sa mga lugar na mananatiling estranghero sa atin kung hindi nga lamang sa pagpapala ng manunulat na tulad ni Carandang. Ngunit ang lubhang pamilyar ay sa damdaming kipkip ng tauhan. Sinasabi pa ng panauhing editor, "May aliw sa pagbabahagi ng mga dalumat kaugnay ng musika, gitara at tagpuan, kahit pa nga ba lubhang romantiko at tigib ng nostalgia ang paksa at himig."

Samantala, "Ang Lihim ng Tula: Isang Ehersisyo" ni Louie Jon A. Sanchez ay mabuting pagsimulan ng mga nagnanais pang magsalin ng mga kathang pampanitikan. Narito ang sanaysay na dumadalumat sa isang hindi mapasusubaliang pangangailangan ng bawat mambabasa, ang salin ng anumang babasahin lalong-lalo na ang tula, upang iparamdam sa mambabasa ang sidhi ng damdamin at talinong dapat taglayin upang maisalin hindi lamang ang mga salita ngunit maging, at ito ang higit na mahalaga, ang emosyong taglay ng teksto. Dangan nga lamang, ayon sa panauhing editor, na ang sanaysay ay "maaaring maging kontrobersiyal ang ilang pasaring sa ilang tendensiya ng pagtula ngayon." Ngunit ano ba? Hindi ba't ang mismong pagharap sa blangkong monitor upang punan ang puting espasyo ay isa nang kontrobersiya para sa sarili, para sa lipunan?

Kaugnay nito ang lagi nang taos na pagsasaad ng damdaming kinakatawan ng kawalang-buhay ng mga titik, ng mga salita. Nasa paghihilera ng ideya ang panggigilalas natin na ipinadadaloy ng makata. Ng isang mabuting makatang may sensibilidad sa paglalarawan ng kapangyarihang mahirap tumbasan ng salita.

Sa mga tula ni Allan Popa lagi nang matutunghayan ang kapangyarihang ito. Sa tulang tuluyan na "Isla Kapung-awan," ipakikilala tayo sa lunan na "tuyo na ang mga balon. Malaon nang hindi umuulan. Tigang na ang mga taniman." Na samantalang naliligid ng tubig, nasa parikala ng uhaw ang isla. Nauuhaw ang isla, isang kolektibang naglalayo sa indibiwal na nilalang sa lunang iyon upang maramdaman natin ang pagnanais na makamit ang titighaw sa sari-sariling pagkauhaw.

Ganito rin halos ang intensidad ng paglalarawan ni Popa sa "Pinilakang Tabing." Narito ang isang madilim na lunang kumakatawan dapat sa lugod na dulot ng panonood ng pelikula ngunit sa kamay ng isang makapangyarihang makata, nagiging isang lunan ng transpormasyon ang bawat tagpo: "Laging nasa likod ng kortina / ang pinagmumulan / ng liwanag // Laging may tabing: / mga dahon, / ulap // Na tila sinasabi // Huwag mo itong titigan / kung ayaw mong masilaw, / mabulag."

Ang tiim ng mga salita ay nasa hindi maihayag na damdamin. Ngunit alam nating naroon, nakapagitan sa mga taludtod. Kung kaya nga bilang tumutunghay sa tula, pinupunan natin ang mga espasyo ng mga salita. Tinutugunan natin ang hinihinging damdamin upang damahin nang lubos ang mga tula ni Popa sa antolohiyang ito.

Ito rin mismo ang inihahatid sa ating tagpo ng sanaysay ni Eli Rueda Guieb III na "Hagkis ng hangin sa bundok na bato, Igkas ng panganib sa mga sungay sa dagat."

Pumapailanlang sa ating ang detalye ng lunan upang kamtin ang nais ipahiwatig sa atin ng may-akda. Tila ba ang pagtunghay mismo ay mensahe nang dapat tayong sumama, pumaloob, at makipamuhay sa islang "nang muli ko [itong] dalawin, ay maganda ang panahon, pero malakas ang alon... Kung alin ang harap at likod ng isla ay hindi naman talaga tiyak. Nakasanayan na lang tawaging harap ng isla ang bahaging may mahaba at manipis na hilata ng mapuputing buhangin."

Nananawagan ng kapahingahan ang isla. Hindi man ito sabihin sa atin ni Guieb, ang bisa ng akda ay nasa pagpapahiwatig. Nasa danas kahit pa ang mambabasa ay lubhang malayo, kahit nasa temporal na mundo ng paupahan sa polusyon ng Kamaynilaan, isang lugar na tigmak at mapaghanap. Isang lugar na hindi matatapos ilarawan ng mga manunulat na may kakayahang hingahan ng buhay ang tila pangyayaring estadistika na lamang ang taguri.

Dito papaloob ang akda ni Mark Angeles. Sa ibang antolohiya marahil ay lubha nang karaniwan ang danas ng lungsod. Ngunit muli itong sinisipat ni Angeles sa kaniyang akdang "Daga." Sa kuwento, mahihiwatigan, nasaan ang hanggahan ng totoo at malikhain? Ang tunay sa hindi? Hindi ba't ang buhay ay tunay na kagila-gilalas at nakaririmarim? Na sa kabila ng pagkamangha sa uri ng pagpanaw, muli't muli tayong gugulantangin ng mga ulat na higit na nakamamangha?

Iilang akda ang naririto. Ngunit, tulad ng mabisang pagkakabuklod, ang iilang akdang ito ay may sapat nang kapangyarihan upang muli tayong maging destiyero sa ating silid upang pagnilayan at suriin ang buhay. O kawalan ng buhay sa ating araw-araw. At mabuti ito.

14 Nobyembre 2014 Lucban, Lalawigan ng Quezon

fiction

Runaway

Tim Tomlinson

ran away when I was seven years old. I'd had it. My mother's rages, followed by days of silence. My father's yard chores, followed by more yard chores, and still more yard chores. I hopped the backyard fence and double-timed the path through the scrap pine and scrub oak till I reached the hump in the path at the woods end. The firehouse on Route 25A loomed white through the vines and scrub behind me. Beyond that, the whirr of traffic.

From where he worked in the backyard, my father could barely see me. I must have appeared as a small plaid blur in the midst of the narrow sickly new- growth woods. It took him a few minutes to put down the hedge clippers, hop the fence, and follow me out to the hump. He seemed to make it out much faster than I had, even though, from the way he walked, he was taking his time.

"Can I sit down?" he asked.

I was free now, a runaway. I'd busted out, flown the coop, shaken off the chains. I wasn't under anyone's control. And I could talk the way escaped men talk.

"It's a free country," I told him.

That made him smile.

He sat, crossed his legs, stretched his boondockers out into the path.

"So what's the score?" he said. "You running away?"

I refused to meet his eyes.

With a stick I scratched undecipherable messages into the soil beneath the pine needles. False clues, red herrings, Maguffins. They could come looking for me, they could get the whole block for a posse, and these clues would lead them every which way but right.

"Looks that way," I said.

He agreed. He said it looked that way all the way from the backyard where we'd just been trimming the hedges and planting new shrubs.

"It can get bad sometimes," he said, "can't it?"

I said it could.

"Intolerable," he said.

"What's intolerable?"

"Worse than bad," he said.

And I said, "Intolerable, yeah," even though I wasn't allowed to say *yeah* to my father. *Yeah*, he always said, was disrespectful. But escaped men, they make up their own rules.

He said, "I hear you."

He shook a cigarette from a pack of Parliament. He held the pack out to me.

"You smoke?" he said.

I shook my head.

"Good," he said. "It's a terrible habit." He stuck a cigarette in his lips and struck a match.

"If it's a terrible habit, how come you do it?"

"That's a good question." He talked and blew out smoke at the same time. One day I would do that, too. I imagined kids watching me the way I watched him, talking normal while smoke poured from his nostrils. "In the Marines," he said, "I guess it just seemed like the thing to do. Everybody smoked." He shook his head, on his face a wistful grin. He pointed to the tattoos on his arms and the one on the calf muscle of his left leg. "Everybody smoked and got these damn things."

The tattoos on his arms he was OK showing. One said "USMC" in a banner below the eagle-over-globe emblem. The other said "Mom" in the midst of what looked like a floral wreath. His friends joked that the wreath looked like the kind you'd send to a funeral. He didn't tell them they were wrong. The one on his leg that ran from ankle to knee, that one he didn't like to show, at least not in public. A half-naked lady, wearing only a towel around her waist, held her hair up in her hands, and her breasts stuck out so convincingly they were almost like 3-D. That one embarrassed him. When we went to the beach, he shaved the hair on his calf and applied opaque masking tape over that tattoo. The tape might last for a swim or two and then peel off. He'd go wait in the car with the doors open in the hot parking lot. He slept in there with the seat back, his hands behind his head, his feet sticking through the open window, until Mom was ready to take us home.

We sat quietly for a few moments. Blue jays flitted from pine to pine. From other backyards we could hear the whine of lawn mowers, the scratching of bamboo rakes.

"This your first time?" he asked. "Running away, I mean."

I told him, no. I'd done it before, half a dozen times.

"But nobody knew?" he said.

I said I didn't really get that far, or stay away so long. But one day I would.

I told him how in *My Side of the Mountain,* Sam Gribley survived alone in the woods with only the animals for friends. Nobody yelling at him, telling him to do chores, telling him that the way he did the chores was wrong. I was going to find out if I could survive like Sam Gribley. I was going to make friends with the animals.

"I'll have to read that book," he said. "Think you can get it for me, from the library?"

"If it's in," I told him.

"Good," he said. "So you're coming back, then? You're not gonna stay run away?"

I said I'd have to think about it.

"Right," he said, "You think it over. It's a big decision, you know that, right?"

I told him yeah.

"Your mother, you know, you run away, it'll break her heart."

I said, "Yeah, sure."

He said, "No, listen, Cliff. Your mother, sometimes she may do

things, crazy things, even mean things. Things you can't understand. That don't mean she don't love you, is that clear?"

I said, "No."

"I know," he said. "But it will be. Some day it will. Do you believe me?"

I shrugged. He said, "Think about that, too." I said, "Fine." "Really," he said. I told him OK.

In the next backyard, Mrs Larkin was pulling the cover off the Larkin's pool. It was time to get ready for summer. We didn't like Mrs Larkin, and she didn't like us. Neither did her son Jim, who was always telling on me.

"Remember that song I taught you?" he asked.

I did, but I said I didn't. I didn't want to let on. I didn't want to let him make me laugh.

He started singing.

Mrs Larkin had a baby, she named him Sonny Jim. She put him in the piss pot to learn him how to swim.

I started laughing. He laughed, too. Then my chest was shaking, and he roughed up my hair.

"Hey," he said. "It's all right." He said, "How'd you like it if you were her kid? Then it would really be intolerable, right."

I agreed.

He said, "Maybe I'll run away with you. Where you want to go? Africa?"

I said I didn't know.

He sang, "Bingo bango bongo, I don't want to leave the Congo, oh no-oh-oh-oh."

I wiped my eyes with my sleeves.

He said, "Hey, I ever tell you about the first time I ran away?"

I said, "You ran away?"

He said, "Did I run away? Once a week, every week, until I ran away for good."

"You ran away for good?"

"I joined the U.S. Marines, killer. I called home from Parris Island. And Cliff, you know what hurt?"

I shook my head.

"What hurt the most—they didn't even know I was gone."

"Nana didn't know you were gone? Poppy?"

He shook his head.

"Only my sisters ever watched out for me, and by the time I was fourteen, fifteen, well ..."

He stuck his cigarette under the heel of a boondocker and crushed it into bits.

"See what I'm doing here with this butt? Now don't you ever smoke, you hear me? I forbid you. But just in case you do, you make sure you crush out the butt all the way, especially in the woods. What did I just say?"

"Crush it out all the way."

"Good," he said. He crossed his legs, leaned forward, and stood up without using his hands to push off. He never used his hands.

"Wait," I said, "what about your sisters?"

"What about them?"

"You said they watched out for you, and then ..."

"Ah," he said, "I'll tell you when you come back."

"If I come back."

"If you come back," he said, "right. But one more thing, Cliffy. See, here's the difference between me and you, right? You run away, we know it. We care. We love you no matter what, and no matter what we do sometimes. You understand?"

I said "Yeah."

"And remember, OK, if you don't come back, this time or some other time, remember, no matter where you go, no matter where you are, no matter what you do, you hear me? No matter what, you'll always be my boy. Will you remember that?"

I told him OK.

"OK," he said.

He proceeded up the woods path, vaulted the split rail fence, retrieved the hedge clippers. The clack-clack-clack of their blades made sharp reports in the woods. He was working the scraggly wall of hemlocks that edged the sides of our property. There was a good time to trim hemlock hedges, a time that would generate strong new growth. And there was a time not to trim hemlock hedges, a time that would stunt growth and promote decay and invite the red spider. And in a month, sometimes less, the red spider could turn a thriving evergreen hemlock dead rust-brown. He never knew which time was the right time. And some of our hemlocks were fir-green, and some were dead and brittle as rust. It was just yard work that he loved doing.

I hopped back over the fence.

"How's that look?" he asked, stepping back from the hedgerow. No matter how straight he got it, he always wanted me to inspect and verify.

I leaned against the last hemlock in the row and closed one eye.

The Dog, the Devil, and the King of Heaven

Nikki Alfar

nce upon a time, there was a king who was so very much a king—so regal, so puissant, so blessed—that his word on occasion became truth, as with the time when a great pale beast of a foreigner came to our court, spouting absurdi-

ties regarding the wondrous animals he had supposedly encountered in the course of his extensive travels, including 'unicorns' and 'kraken' and 'lions'.

The lion, so he claimed, was a magnificent animal with a proud ruff of hair about its face, sharp claws and teeth, and a deep, throaty cry that set all lesser creatures atremble. It was fierce in battle, he recounted, and likewise fierce in its devotion to its kith and kin.

"Ah," said the king, nodding in imagined comprehension, "it is very like a dog, then."

The next morning, thus, many dogs of the realm awakened to find a mane of abundant curls surrounding our faces, our once-tidy paws expanded into ungainly pincushions of unnaturally retractable talons, our formerly-elegant snouts foreshortened into thick muzzles and broad noses, akin to those of tigers.

And the king looked upon us and called the transformation good, and decreed that, thereafter, every temple in the land was to be watched over by a pair of such Dogs of Prosperity—fu—who would defend the sanctity of these buildings through their ability to ward off bad energy and discern the intentions of people.

Even a dog's devotion will not permit me to name him a particularly wise king. In truth, he was a bit of a beast himself, strong and large and loud and well-formed, his luxuriant mustaches setting him apart from the common run of smooth-skinned humanity, his prowess in battle well earning him his title 'Protector of the People,' his earnest—if often illinformed—benevolence toward his subjects garnering him the accolade 'King of Heaven.'

And since his word did always become the law of the land and at times even the law of nature, perhaps wisdom, after all, was not so very crucial a trait that he lacked. More frequently than not, in fact, he did quite well without it.

This is a tale of one of those very times.

Many years ago, a terrible famine swept the kingdom. One might think that the King of Heaven might easily negate such catastrophes with a mere wave of his hand and a lofty spoken edict, but the peculiarity of his gift was such that he had to believe what he was saying in order for it to have a chance of becoming truth.

Alas, the very growling of his belly made it impossible for His Majesty to consider that all was well, and when the king himself is driven to imagine how delicious, how tender, how filling a giant squid might be—if one could only manage to capture a kraken—it is a clear indication that all is not in the least bit well.

Therefore, he issued a proclamation. "Anyone who is able to put an end to this dreadful famine," he announced, before the assembled crowd in his vast audience chamber, "shall win the hand of my beloved niece, the Princess—the Princess—"

Ever alert, I was quick to growl the name in attempted aid of my forgetful master, but as always, he did not hear me over the boom of his own voice.

"My niece the princess," he finished, gesturing grandly toward the poor girl so vaguely mentioned, who endeavored to look as desirable and rewarding—not to mention memorable—as possible, from her place on the dais.

"But, Your Majesty," said a woman, striding boldly forth from out of the multitude, "suppose I have no interest in the hand of your niece?"

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"Ah, a woman, are you?" said the king. "Do you say that it is within your power to alleviate this famine?"

"Perhaps," she said, lowering her eyes in a manner that made every curly hair on my mane stand even further on end—for I knew, from merely the look of her, that she was the very devil.

Now, you must understand that I had previously been, in many ways, a quite ordinary dog. True, I could speak, but that was only a consequence of my having been born from a gourd, which cracked open and revealed me when it was served upon an especially fine porcelain platter during one particular royal dinner—hence my name, Pan Gu. It was when I had grown far enough beyond puppyhood to understand that my name meant 'plategourd' that I began to realize that my master, for all his other resplendent attributes, was no enlightened sage.

I had thus taken it upon myself as my lifelong mission to protect him from not only physical harm, but also the many perils likely to proceed from the foolishness of his over-generous and inadequately-suspicious heart, however unexpectedly such dangers might be made known to me through my theretofore-nonexistent facility to perceive the black and white of reality behind the glamorous hues of deception.

And that, I assure you—that, and no other—is the reason that I said, "Master, she is not as she seems."

But he was oblivious, being in the midst of asking, "Then what would you have of me, fair lady, should you manage to do as you say?"

"I would have your hand, instead," she said, her impudent smile like a knife, "my Lord, my Liege, my Sovereign."

"But, Master, she is the devil!" I barked, becoming heedless of appropriate courtly behavior in my alarm. Unfortunately, the crowd was all abuzz in astonishment, and the sense of my words was lost in their reverberant murmuring.

"Hush, Pan Gu," said the king. "So be it."

That very night, feeling that I had little other recourse, I set out from the palace, armed with no more than my ability of speech, the newfound gifts my master had apparently bestowed upon my race, and my own native canine abilities, which enabled me to readily follow the devil-woman's scent trail. I began with a lengthy overland journey of three dawns and dusks, which occasioned some instances of confrontation with ruffians both twoand four-legged, but as it turned out, a dog with the size and vague countenance of a predatory feline—not to mention teeth as large as human fingers—had not much to worry about in that respect. My one concern was how I was to brace the eighteen no doubt well-guarded levels of Diyu, once I arrived underground.

To my surprise and relief, however, my status as a somewhat spiritual being—since I was nominally a temple guardian, as most of my kind had indeed become—as well as, presumably, my recently-gained ability to ward off 'bad energy' allowed me to enter and traverse the underworld unmolested by its denizens, if not entirely unharmed.

A great deal more travel followed, past the Chamber of Tongue-Ripping, where gossips were silenced evermore; the Orchard of Iron Cycads, where those who caused discord among families were impaled on the razor-like branches of metal trees; and on through the Chambers of Scissors, of Mirrors, of Steam.

My mane crisped in the Hall of Copper Columns, where arsonists were bound to pillars of red-hot metal. My paws were lacerated, climbing past murderers over the Mountain of Knives. Even my thick coat did not keep me from shivering, beneath the rain of pain and the wind of sorrow that constantly lashed the Town of Suicides.

Still, focused on my objective, I pressed on, beyond the Hill of Ice, the Cauldron of Boiling Oil, the Pool of Blood, the Volcano of Thieves, the Mill of Stone, and the further Chambers of Rock, Saws, Bulls, Pounding, and Dismemberment.

At last I found my way to the devil's very throne room, where she greeted me with rather startling delight. "How marvelous!" she gloated. "The fool king has actually sent me a gift!"

It was at that point that I allowed myself to entertain the notion that perhaps all sovereigns were slow of mind, or at least slightly mad. It was not as though I was accompanied by an ambassador, to present me, nor was I bearing a royal seal or any other such adornment which might indicate that I had been intended as a token of esteem.

Nevertheless, I resolved to take advantage of the supposed-woman's arrogance. Spying a tray of liquor nearby, I grasped it in my maw—a thing

that would not have been possible, had my muzzle not been enlarged to grotesque proportions—and proffered it to her, as though in homage.

"A celebratory drink, is it?" She took a glass in hand, with delight. "Indeed, there is much to celebrate. All I need do is wait for the famine I have already countermanded to come to its end. Then I shall present myself to your former master, and become queen of both heaven and hell!" Laughing, she raised the glass to her lips and drank.

And drank. And drank some more, as I plied her with wine and spirits which she was utterly amused to accept, on and on until she finally succumbed and staggered, in decidedly unladylike fashion, to her private bedchamber, where she collapsed into a snoring stupor. I was permitted to accompany her—I was understood to have become 'her' dog, after all which was convenient enough for my purposes, but left me, still, with a quite significant inconvenience to contend with.

The famine, evidently, was no longer a problem, but the promised royal marriage remained a rather substantial dilemma. I had entertained a naïve notion of bodily dragging the devil before my master and revealing her true nature, but I had come to appreciate that this was enormously impracticable, what with orchards and mountains and mills and chamber upon chamber upon chamber to traverse, back into sunlight. As robust and powerful as my new form was, I did not believe I could go through all of that again with a full-sized human in tow, even if it was not, in fact, truly a human.

It is with some shame that I recount what I did next. Surely there must have been some more intelligent, more dignified way to accomplish my purpose, but instead of devising such, I simply bit the devil's head off and, clutching it in my tremendous maw and sharp teeth, fled.

"AH, MY FAITHFUL companion, where have you been for so long?" the king cried, upon my eventual return to the palace.

This was very like him, to greet me with affectionate alacrity while apparently ignoring the grisly head that I dropped at his feet, panting.

It was only after his niece had uttered a muffled shriek and fainted gracefully to the polished floor that he seemed to take notice. "What is this? Oh, Pan Gu, what have you done to my promised bride?!"

Having had much time and many reasons, by then, to have explored the full extent of my new abilities, I barked three times. The seeming of the beautiful woman—at least, I can only assume that she was meant to have been beautiful—disappeared, to be replaced with the true, hideous visage of the devil, which to this very day I cannot bring my powers of either speech or will to adequately describe.

"The famine was but a plot to marry you and thereafter steal your throne, Master," I said.

"Pan Gu!" my master exclaimed, with somewhat mortifying amazement. "You can talk!"

Mindful once more of my courtly graces, I replied only, "It is my honor and privilege to do so, Your Majesty."

"To think that such treachery could come from one so lovely," he said, shaking his head in sorrow and evident failure, once more, to fully comprehend. "Ah, Pan Gu, if there only existed a woman with precisely your sterling qualities, I should gladly marry her instead."

And so the next day, after I had fully explained to the king—and, more to the point, his ministers— what had happened, I awakened as a human woman, distressingly long of limb, virtually bare of fur, and worst of all, feebly blunt of tooth.

Perplexingly, I seemed to be the only one troubled by this occurrence.

I hastened, of course, to reassure His Majesty that I would not hold him to his word, but being a man of honor—if not always prudence—he was adamant, stating that, in any case, if there was any one being that he could be said to love above all others, it was surely myself.

For my part, I gazed at him with my new human eyes and saw him clearly for what he was: a fool, a blundering oaf, a great hairy beast of a man who would, with precious little hesitation, give himself and his kingdom away to some stranger he had never even laid eyes on previously.

Yet my heart, which seemed to have remained unchanged, saw him also as good, unflinchingly noble, so caring of his people that he would, with precious little hesitation, give himself and his kingdom away to some stranger he had never even laid eyes on previously, so long as he believed it was for their benefit. And this, my pup, my cub, my darling girl, is why I am telling you this tale—so that you will know, as you grow from poppet to princess, the most important thing that I learned in my journey from inside a gourd to under the ground, from being an intruder in hell to becoming, eventually, Queen of Heaven.

Listen, then, and remember—some may have more wisdom, and some may have less, but love makes dogs of us all.

The Never-ending Island

Cyan Abad-Jugo

hat once might have been Atlantis sank to the bottom of the ocean and came out on the other side of the world. What once was a flourishing and prosperous rock, a flowering, ever-evolving achievement, the

pride of mankind, became a backward, degenerate lump of human mess and misery.

My father calls that second country Pazienza, a land alive only in memory, and better loved only by memory. Perhaps he means to live up to the name of his homeland, but he does patiently spend his life poring over ancient maps and setting up the most frightful calculations on his secondhand computer. Or maybe he does not, as he cannot be spoken to while he is in the heat of figuring out the where and when of a new island. He is sure that it will happen again one day; the island will resurface, bringing with it all the forward fortune that Atlantis once had.

It stands to reason, he argues, that what advancements there were in Atlantis, and what regressions there were in Pazienza, would then become a pendulum swing back to advancements.

Well then, I argue back, does it not stand to reason that the island will resurface where Atlantis once was, again at the other side of the world?

He waves me impatiently away. It isn't so simple, he tells me, there are at least three new possible locations for this new Atlantis.

And I think it isn't just complicated, it is also impossible. I can see by how much paper my father has printed and thrown away; I can look on all

the wrong calculations according to plate tectonics, continental drift, and the earth's increasingly displaced orbit around the sun.

Back to the kitchen I go, where my mother heats her rage with the stew. She is not Paziente, like him, but Patria—native to the Motherland that embraced the refugees, when finally the ocean reclaimed its island. This is mother's argument: there will be no resurfacing; the ocean had given the island a second chance, which it had thrown away in favor of self-advancement and glorification.

To tell you the truth, I do not care for their arguments, and I do not understand why they had to come together in the first place, and have me, when they cannot even agree to the where and when of dinnertime. My mother clings to illusions that we could still be a family that eats together, but by now we ought to accept the fact that my father will eat alone, at a time inconvenient to the rest of us, when the leftovers have turned moldy. He will be out of sorts, proclaiming himself the imbecile, not worthy of solving an important problem for his people.

What I really want to know is why my mother can't call him to dinner in the first place. Why does it have to be me? I usually don't mind keeping my mother company; after all, I like her cooking. But today she tries to send me back to my father after he has driven me away, and I am hungry. I rush out of the kitchen and cross the backyard to enter Old Reyes' hut.

Old Reyes has stayed in bed today, with a bowl of rice soup on a cushion beside him. "Has the world's most urgent mystery been solved?" Old Reyes calls by way of greeting. He waves me to his table, where there's a plate of olives and cheese, and bread in the bread bin. I try not to think of my mother's warm food, the strips of beef over steamed rice, brimming with her garlic and mushroom gravy.

Old Reyes does not approve of father's work. What's the use of finding Pazienza, if there are no Pazientes left, is his question. (And it's true, because more and more Pazientes have left to seek their fortune elsewhere, outside of Patria). Only Pazientes can bring back Pazienza, is his answer. And one can bring back Pazienza through story.

Nobody tells a story like Old Reyes does. I remember when I was a child, among other Paziente children, sitting at Old Reyes' feet. He could still move around in those days, and he was always much more fun than the Patria Catechists who came to the camp and made us sit on chairs in their

stuffy Municipio. My mind now thinks particularly about the tale of the bamboo, how the bamboo shot out of the earth, each bamboo bearing a man and a woman. "And when the tree split down the middle and opened, they woke to the surface of the world. They shared what they could gather and hunt. They worked together tilling the soil and catching fish in the ocean. They sat in a circle and had all their meals together."

It's the thought of sharing meals that troubles me. Perhaps it is my mother who is Paziente, and my father who is Patria. How I wish just once my father could join us at table.

I help myself to Old Reyes' meager meal, trying not to think about when Old Reyes might get a fresh loaf. It's when I'm choking on a dry morsel that Vito chooses to make his entrance. As I am grasping for the water jug, he is ceremoniously pouring wine into a cup. Even if his older brother Lalo is there, frowning at all of us, he kneels on the floor and holds the wine up to me.

Of course I push the cup away, though I can't help but laugh. Vito is Patria, like my mother, with long lashes and olive skin. His dark hair curls around his ears in the most endearing way. Old Reyes' warnings about particular presumptions ring in my ears like the dissonant bells of the church in our camp.

Lalo heaves a basket of food onto the table, with such unnecessary force. Vito stands up, dusting his knees. "We've got a few more drops to make through camp, Vito," Lalo says, and turns to me. "Mai, you help Old Reyes distribute these. And get everybody ready for the Don's visit tomorrow. I mean everybody, including your loony dad."

With perfect timing, Vito drops a warm loaf onto my hands before I can clench them into fists and drive them through his brother. He folds my fingers over the bread, as Lalo leaves the hut without another glance. "My love to Auntie," he whispers, before he follows his brother out. He means my mother. Their families are related somewhere, but Old Reyes says my mother has no noble blood now, so Don Eduardo, Vito's father, will never approve a half-and-half like me. Yet another warning against presumption.

I am sorry to see Vito go, and long to run after him, but there is now the fresh bread, the grapes and cheese, to distribute throughout our part of the camp. Vito's family belongs to a line of noble land tillers, and they grew both olives and grapes, enough to feed all of Patria. So Old Reyes told me. But they had many enemies, and one day the inconstant, unstable Government decided to build the biggest Paziente refugee camp on top of their vineyards. The family was reduced to feeding and tending the refugees, with the supposed aid of the Government, except sometimes, for months, the government aides never showed up. By the time Old Reyes was born into the camp, the family had taken it solely upon themselves to take care of the refugees—it was a matter of honor—and some of the refugees in turn began to work for the family, the family's relations, their friends, and the ever-growing, ever-extending web of connections they have made through their lives.

The camp is actually some kind of halfway house now; most of the refugees have been on Patria for so long that fewer and fewer live at the camp at all, or recall such a land as Pazienza. Most have gone to work for Patria families, and some have gone outside of Patria altogether. All the camp has left are the old, the very young, the sick and hungry. Some of them are not even Pazientes, nor Patria, but stragglers, lost travelers who never found their way again, or orphans left on the doorstep by gypsies from the South. Then there's the occasional runaway, a smuggler or two, and my mother and father who belong nowhere.

In the early evening, as I empty the basket of food in the last house, Vito finds me. As I give him back his basket, he stays my hand. His hand covers mine very gently, so that we are both holding the basket. Even so, I feel the weave of the basket handle dig into my palm.

I avoid Vito's eyes.

I understand why Old Reyes keeps warning me about these things. I know that my mother was disowned for marrying a Paziente. I know that Old Reyes does not want me, or perhaps Vito, to get hurt.

"Will you not love me, Mai?" he says in the near-dark.

My heart crushes under the weight of such a question. And I do not know why he must continue to plague me with such questions. In their big house, outside of our camp, many Patria beauties have already paraded themselves. I have heard that one had already been chosen for Lalo. It would only be a matter of time before Vito is matched too. She would be the best and brightest, the most beautiful one, and he would forget me. It is difficult to swallow such a thought. I struggle to let the basket go, and Vito grasps my hand all the harder so that I finally cry out.

"What is it?" he asks, inspecting my hand in the light of our one remaining moon. There's a red welt, which he tries to soothe with his fingers.

But it hurts too, the way Vito looks into my face searching for answers. He looks just like my father then, with eyes that anticipate, and eyes that are full of fear.

I pull away, hiding my hands behind me.

"Let me see, Mai, let me see," he urges.

"Let me be." I say back, and even if I really don't want to, I run away.

There used to be seven moons, according to one of Old Reyes' tales. But the Sarimanok, that greedy ball of fire in the sky, gobbled them up like grains of rice, one after the other. The Pazientes called to the Sky-God, begging him not to let the firebird eat up all their light at night. And the Sky-God, hearing, gave light to the dust of the old moons, turning them into stars. He lent the last moon wings every time the Sarimanok caught up. But one day, the Sky-God will not be ready. One day the Sarimanok will steal the wings and eat up the last moon. One day the Sarimanok will starve for lack of moons, and burn out. And we shall all be in darkness.

In the darkness of my room, I wonder: within the orbit of our camp, who is the moon, who the sun? Who is the one who takes, yet the one who can never have? And who is the one who would love to be caught, to be held, engulfed forever, but for the worry of what might happen to her parents, going nowhere, living in the middle of nowhere?

O Water-God, let my father have his island back.

My mother nearly smashes her pots and pans in the effort to rouse my father from his study. Don Eduardo is due to arrive soon, with a group of doctors for Inspection.

"Almost! Almost!" my father screams, adding his own noise by pounding on the computer keys. To hear my father speak, you'd think we could pack our bags and be back on the island tomorrow. To hear him refer to his homeland, you'd think he had seen it with his own eyes. To see my father work, you'd think the island would resurface in his lifetime.

It is unclear to me whether Pazienza came to be soon after Atlantis

was not. My father is not sure either, though he hypothesizes that as it sank, it went from slow to fast until it reached the earth's core, and then from fast to slow as it traveled to the other side. It also neatly explains why the fortunes went in reverse when the island became Pazienza.

Nothing is neat, my mother often argues. Not his desk, nor his life either. She says this in an undertone so that he'll never hear. Everyone else thinks he is mad to even believe in such mythology. They say our island never surfaced; it was simply discovered. Perhaps everyone is right, and my father is wrong, and my mother and I are just here to make sure he doesn't starve accidentally. Today, my mother points out to me that my father merely married her for her computer, her science books, her access to information.

"And then," she adds, "I married him to spite my father, my family and their turned-up noses." She sniffs with her own, very straight and aquiline one. "And so I am here, in the camp, instead of outside it. And the doctors will inspect even me, me!"

And me, I start to wonder, whom shall I marry? Whom shall I spite? Will I ever live outside this camp? And does Vito—cheerful, graceful, happy boy—have it in his heart to spite anybody? Why, he loves even his nasty brother Lalo.

Both of them are present at the Inspection. They stand slightly behind their father, Don Eduardo, who stands slightly behind the Head Doctor. The Head Doctor and his team have each been given a chair and a table. We all know what to do and are no longer asked to line up, and wait to be called, by family and by hut and camp area. But my father, after each season, remains at a loss. He bumps into people, and is greeted by them, but he recognizes no one. His eyes briefly light up when he sees us before the table in front of the Head Doctor, but then he also sees my mother's scowl. Swiftly, he takes his hat off and bows to the Don, then ruffles what's left of his fine, white hair.

Vito tries to catch my eye, but I would very much rather he disappeared. I am sure that by the time the Head Doctor is done with his inspection, Vito would have had enough of my eyes and nose and ears and throat, not to mention the angry beat of my humiliated heart. And then Lalo leans forward and whispers to the Don, and Don Eduardo clears his throat to address my mother. "Beatriz, your daughter is grown." She nods, and I am one step away from a curtsy when he adds, "We can't have her picking olives all her life. You should think about sending her to your old convent school."

"But," my mother says, wringing her hands, "Don Eduardo, she is—"

"A mixture." He does not even acknowledge my father. "The world is changing. They might take her in as a chambermaid. Perhaps there she might pick up better habits than yours."

My mother's face reddens. Idly, I wonder if behind her collar, her neck is red too. But she lifts her chin, and says for all to hear, "I thank you, Don Eduardo, for your thoughts." Her lips tighten into a straight line. Whatever she sees in the far distance, that is where I want to run. But here, inside the camp, there is nowhere to run.

After such a scene, I have to escort the Head Doctor to Old Reyes' hut. Today, Old Reyes could not get out of bed. Both his legs are swollen from the knees down. I busy myself with helping him sit up, plumping his pillows, straightening his collar, and fetching a glass of water for him. Even then, I can hear Vito arguing with his father outside.

"But I want to observe. I have set my heart on being a Doctor."

"Maybe you have set your heart on her," Lalo sneers.

"Don't be long, then," says Don Eduardo. "We have guests coming."

Vito enters the hut with a frown. Old Reyes looks at me as the Head Doctor listens to his heart. He reaches his hand out, and I take it. "The Sky-God and the Land-God were brothers," he said.

"It's just a story," I say quickly, but I do not let go his hand nor his eyes. Vito stands right beside me, talking to the Head Doctor.

"They were both in love with a litao," Old Reyes continues. "She was a woman with a tail, a creature of the sea."

A lump grows in my throat as I tell him, "I have never seen the sea."

"Neither of them could catch her."

"Neither of them really loved her. They wanted her as a prize." And I think, but even just the one brother for me, is not for me. I grit my teeth to keep the tears in.

The Head Doctor and Vito converse about Old Reyes' rheum. Less salt, one says. More exercise, says the other. But Vito is trying to draw me into their conversation. "Tell her," he tells the Head Doctor. "She takes good care of the old man."

When the Head Doctor leaves, I follow him to the doorway, but Vito pulls me back. "Old Reyes has not ended his tale. What happens next?" He places a chair beside his, where I am supposed to sit.

"The Water-God gave them a challenge," Old Reyes says, now happy to be telling a story. "Whoever could make the litao surface from the bottom of the ocean would win her as his prize."

"Well, if she lived at the bottom of the ocean, I wonder how they knew about her in the first place." If I ever saw the sea, I think I would drown myself.

"Oh Mai," Vito says, "hush and listen!"

"I already know this story," I say. "The Sky-God makes it rain, and the Land-God makes the earth quake. She neither floats up to the surface to bathe in the rain, nor goes near land to see what all the shaking is about. In truth, she is betrothed to the Water-God. He is a very nasty fellow for playing a trick on his brothers like that."

"But that is not all of the story. The floods rise in the islands, and the land cracks and destroys everything. The Pazientes call to both the Sky-God and the Land-God for help, but they are too busy with their contest. In the end, Pazienza sinks into the sea, and becomes a new home for the Water-God's bride."

Vito says, "That's not how you said Pazienza was lost," and in spite of all the stories I have known and heard, I find myself wishing I could just sit and listen to Old Reyes tell all his tales again. When I was a child, time would stand still for me while Old Reyes spoke, and now time just marches onward, waiting for no one. Someday soon, I know, Old Reyes will fall silent, and the only private space for Vito and me will be gone.

"But it's still about the Sky-God and the Land-God," I say, inspite of myself, surprised at the connection I've made. "They were arguing about who would rule over the Pazientes."

The Land-God insisted that the Pazientes were karibangs, creatures who lived underground, in the second-layer of the earth. When the bamboo shot from the earth, some of the karibangs sprouted along to be the first men and women of Pazienza. Therefore, the Land-God felt he owned them. But the Sky-God believed it was the Sun, the Moon, and the Rain that made the bamboo grow, and the people blossom. And so the Sky-God declared his dominion over Pazienza. Again the Water-God stepped in to arbitrate. Again, the Water-God embraced all of Pazienza to himself, claiming the land and its people.

"But of course, some of us lived, right?"

Vito sighs. "There are no such gods in our history books. Just a description of how Pazienza broke into a million pieces and the sea sucked up the shards. Some people floated on tiny bits of island until they were picked up by the galleons of Patria."

"Except that you say it much better than your history books, which are never so poetic," I point out. I've read a few battered books from my father's shelf. More stuff than anyone ever wants to know about longitude and latitude and galleon reports. I look away when he smiles, and pretend to brush dust from Old Reyes' shoulder.

"I am fine, girl," the old man says irritably. I think that perhaps he is saddened by the fact that we know his stories almost as much as he does. It's another sign that time marches on, waiting for no one. And then suddenly he grabs my hand. "Mai, very good! If you can remember all I've said, and if your father ever finds the island again, then maybe...". But then, just as suddenly, he flings my hand away and weeps. "It's no use, time never goes back to the way it was before. We might as well accept that. But even so, Mai, try to remember, for the sake of this old fool."

Again it is evening, again Vito walks me home, and again he holds my hand. If time marches onward, it also seems to run around in circles.

"I'd rather your father never found Pazienza," Vito begins. "I'd rather you stayed here with me. I wish you'd stay here forever with me."

It is I who am filled with fear. "You would much rather I stayed in this camp forever. Maybe I am going away."

"But where would you go?"

"To the convent. I am going to be a chambermaid."

Vito draws me to him. "Nonsense. You take Lalo and my father to heart."

"And you? You take nothing seriously?"

He is silent. I try to break away from his grasp, but he pulls me closer. "It is you, Mai, who makes a joke of everything I say. What must I do so that you will trust me?"

And if time ran around in circles, it also makes for that sudden break and leap forward. I cannot stand a perfect circle. I would much rather break my heart and get it over with.

"Get my father to sup with us. Just once," I say, and then I run.

On my return home, there is another circle to follow, round and round my father in this never-ending dinner charade. My mother sits in her place at table, and she says, "Wash your hands, we will now have our meal. Can you call your father to table, please?"

But since I am still riding the wind on my leap forward, I say, "When will you admit that he will never say yes?"

"Let me call him, Señora," Vito says behind me.

My mother and I cannot utter a sound. Vito has never set foot in our hut before. He walks unhurriedly to my father's study, and knocks politely on the door.

"Almost!" my father cries, but he cannot say the word again when Vito opens his door.

And just like that, we are all at table, and I do not know where to look or what to think. My father keeps looking at me as I pass him the rice, the strips of beef, the bowl of gravy. He also keeps looking down at his plate, as if he has never seen food before. I know this is the same untouched meal from lunch. My mother is flushed with pleasure; she tries to draw my father and Vito into conversation by describing how she cooked the beef, what garnishings she used, the cabbage and red peppers that give it more flavor. And Vito speaks to her graciously, complementing her on her expertise in cooking. They are all at their best behavior, and I feel as if I have disappeared.

None of us really know how to eat with company. My mother keeps elbowing me to join in the conversation, and my father bangs his cup on the table, indicating to my mother that she has forgotten his drink, which is usually a mixture of crushed fruit we can grow in our own backyard. Vito tells everyone to be at their ease, and to let him be of some service. He opens my mother's cupboard, and as he has suspected, my mother has a little stock of wine with his family's crest rupturing the surface of the bottle. I already know what is on his mind, and rise quickly. A chair topples down, and a disapproving sound escapes my mother's lips before she can stop it.

"What are you doing?" I demand, barring his way to our cups.

"We had a deal, Mai," he says, his eyes twinkling.

"It was a joke," I say.

"So you take nothing seriously?" He advances toward me and I have to step aside or risk contact with his arm. He reaches for the goblet. It is clear now, even to my parents, why he is here.

My mother, still a Patria at heart, wavers between pride and uncertainty. "That is not your family cup," she says.

My father, still struggling with all his thoughts, reacts with horror. "But Señor, she is not Patria. Your father..."

"My father is not here, sir. He has made his choice for Lalo, and I will make my own choices." He pours wine into the goblet, and kneels at my feet, proffering the cup. "Won't you agree with me, Mai? Couldn't you trust me? Shouldn't we be starting our own traditions from this moment on?"

I am trying to get him to stand up. "Please, Vito, please. Stop making jokes."

We are at this awkward impasse when Lalo barges in. "I'm afraid you've stayed out too long," he tells his brother. "Father will be here shortly."

It was not a pleasant moment for our family, and I would have wanted to quickly forget it. Vito took a swing at his brother, and was in disgrace when Don Eduardo arrived with the news: the guests at their manor had waited too long. Señora Maria Faustino de Gracia might have been the perfect match for Vito, but he had given in to baser tastes and instincts. This was unfortunately too much for my mother, who instantly threw our evening meal along with the crockery in the Don's direction. He was also, unfortunately, accompanied by a retinue of foremen, who restrained Vito, my mother, and anyone else who wanted to attack the Don.

"Beatriz," Don Eduardo said, "I took you in when none of your own family wanted you, and this is how you repay me, by stealing my son. You are to leave this camp tonight, and God bless you on your way."

And this is how I finally leave the camp behind. We are escorted to his carriage, with just the clothes on our back and a bit of the bread that Vito and Lalo brought to camp the other day. Time runs out too, it disappears, when you need it most. We cannot even say goodbye to Old Reyes, I cannot even have my last look at the man I love.

We are deposited at a hut in the first town just outside Don Eduardo's lands. The landlord, Señor Joaquin, is yet another of my mother's relations, but he chooses to ignore her, and pretend she is another stranger he must attend to, while she has the money. I eye the pouch that one of Don Eduardo's men had given my mother. How long before it all runs out?

When we move in, I realize I have to sleep on the floor. My parents speak no word of blame, and my eyes are dry. My mother refuses to speak at all. Surprisingly, it is my father who breaks the silence. He realizes at last what he has lost: access to his computer and his files. We fall asleep to the thrum of his regrets.

By the next day he has talked himself into a fever, and by nightfall he is delirious. He struggles to get up and finds himself defeated by the bedclothes. He writes his equations on them, with the use of a pen that he has found somehow. "Almost, almost," he murmurs, "please don't distract me, the island is here. It's here. Get me a map, a map, I'll tell you where."

My mother looks at him askance and says nothing. She leaves the hut the next morning, and I am left with my father and our dwindling pieces of bread. I try to coax him to eat.

He holds my hands, my face. "You cannot stay here. You have to return. This is not your land. They are not your people."

I look at my father because he had finally granted my wish to sup with us, but he has lost his way. He is lost to mass, velocity, and gravity. He is lost in his equations.

I try to take the pen away from him. "Even the Water-God got his heart broken. It seems no one in our cosmogony is spared. This was during the time of his long engagement with the litao, whom we shall call Maria. Have you noticed, father, that everyone beautiful and kind and marriageable is called Maria in our stories? But you have never listened to Old Reyes. Well, then, let me tell you this tale."

A young Paziente fisherman came upon the litao while they bathed in the river one day. They were Maria and her sisters. He found where they had hid their tails under some river fronds, and on a whim, took one home. The tail turned out to be Maria's. While her sisters found theirs to wear, for their return to the sea, Maria had to stay and search for her tail. She could not return without it.

The fisherman found her weeping by the riverbank the very next day. Though he knew what ailed her, he kept silent about it, and took her home. Soon, she agreed to be his wife.

The Water-God could do nothing about it. His brothers were too busy fighting to listen to his troubles. He learned from Maria's sisters that his betrothed had lost her tail and would soon wed the fisherman.

He could do nothing but bide his time, and watch Maria from afar. She would come to the shore to bid her husband goodbye on his fishing expeditions. The fisherman, he protected, because he stood between Maria and their neighbors, who were suspicious of Maria because she was so different. And then, one day, the Water-God met Maria's children swimming in the sea ...

"A boy and a girl, Father," I say, but he barely lifts his head. So busy is he writing yet more equations. And I am near tears at last, for I remember a boy and a girl hiding behind a thousand year-old olive tree, pretending to be the first bamboo man and bamboo woman. Vito had also loved Old Reyes' stories. In his spare time away from school, he would go to the old man's hut and listen. And I have lost them all, Vito, Old Reyes, and one day soon, my father.

"Give me a map, girl," he croaks, then pushes my empty hand away. "Never mind, I will make my own."

Above us, the sky thunders and quakes. There is so much rain in the next few days. My father strains to the last against the bedclothes. He begs me to pack my bags and reclaim the island. We will have to bury him soon, in the second layer of the earth. He will be swallowed up by land that is not his. Will there be karibangs to meet him? Have they too been lost when Pazienza went under?

My mother, who is Patria, somehow sends word to Don Eduardo. She bears my father's body back to the camp, where he can be buried. I am not allowed the journey. Perhaps Don Eduardo fears that Vito still loves me. It is then that I make for the city and the harbor. My mother is Patria, she can make her way back to her people. I am neither Patria nor Paziente, I have to make my own way. The Water-God told the children to look in their father's hiding places. They thought it was a game. One day they told him they had seen something funny and strange under their hut, a fishtail as long as their father's boat. And then the Water-god told them to tell their mother about the tail, and about him. Obviously Maria had a choice to make, and she made it. Perhaps it was because the neighbors had never truly accepted her. Perhaps her husband the fisherman had never truly loved her. Perhaps it was just because she was a creature of the sea, and therefore had to return to the sea.

I have looked at my father's hiding place, it is full of calculations, and they are correct. The blanket that I bundle up in at night has a map that is fading, like Pazienza; still, it does not completely wash out. Somewhere past Éire, where he indicated, there is a new island re-forming, on an ancient ocean that yields but also takes away.

Everywhere the reports are the same: Somewhere past Éire, silver modules shoot down from the sky, each bearing a man and a woman. They are tiny, stout creatures, with a head full of hair. Their modules connect and become a floating island. Elsewhere there is doubt and hesitation, but I have found one captain, one galleon, who must rush, and race, to be the first to get there and greet them. I have the exact coordinates, thus have I found my place in the ship. And thus must I go back to the sea, if it will have me.

[with thanks to Dad, who created Pazienza]

Oscar

Kat Del Rosario

hen Oscar awoke at last to the cold, it was an awakening unlike anything for there was no line between it and of sleeping. He was only ever conscious of the promise of sun, hidden behind

a haze of what Oscar knew vaguely as clouds, those great haunches of plump grey white bruised with purple, or sometimes orange, or what he remembered of it; Oscar became aware that he could not see, and he could not hear; and Oscar did not mind. He stayed in his favorite chair by the window, dotted with the afterthought of last night's rain, awaiting the sun.

When the house came to life, as with the street, low whispers of dreams ending and eyelids unfolding, kitchens and trikes sputtering to life, slippered feet slid quietly over floors waxed to a blush, and as the maid bent over to pick up yesterday's newspaper—scattered across the living room floor as usual she gasped and quite loudly, exclaimed, "*Santamariajosporsanto*!" to see a plant in sir's favorite rattan armchair. It was a knobbly, pathetic looking thing, with wiry, rheumatic roots and limbs that twisted and bent in odd directions, giving way to boughs that sighed under the succession of leaves shaped like hearts, spinning their way to the top where they gathered into a bald, wispy knob, waiting to sprout, stooped over slightly as if asleep.

The world lurched as the maid crammed him into a clay pot where the lucky bamboo shoots had recently died; and as he was set upon the windowsill Oscar tasted the morning, considered for a moment the many strange rituals he had taken care to go through every morning, how amusing, how ridiculous it was, now that it was quite a joy to be so still.

When his wife found that he wasn't at the dinner table that night, she started to look for him. Oscar did not need to eat dinner anymore since he already had his fill of sun and air. Her voice rang loud and swift all over the house, echoing across the walls. She called for him in every room, and when she didn't find him, she rang the police. Once or twice it crossed her mind that Oscar might have gotten too upset and run off, but ah, then again, she knew the man had no spine and would come trotting back home, bald head hanging low like a sorry dog. And she was right, for Oscar had not the spine to run away, being too devoted to his wife and daughter the only way he knew how, faithfully working longer and longer hours for bigger and bigger paychecks, dealing with all his anxiety with sleep, sometimes wondering how peaceful it would be if he would be given time to be still, and wishing, fervently wishing as a thunderstorm passed over the house, that he could stay as he was then, in the most motionless of states, nourished only by rain.

The police came the next morning, as Oscar's wife had demanded. Oscar could have been amused, for his wife had never been so flustered, had he not been so occupied with the sun. He found that he had no control over his body, that he could not so much as move his leaves, but that he knew where each of them sprouted, knew how his roots settled comfortably among the soil. In every inch and nook of himself he found that he could breathe and feel somehow, the air and sunlight coming together within him and every bit of him, and he had never been so blissful and content. He found that he would be gladdened by the quick breeze and sickened by fumes from the street below, feeling a slow, inward urge to curl and seize the stillness, as the unwanted stuff passed through the inside of him. He was unaffected as his wife made quite a show of weeping, weaving stories of infidelity and constant arguments. Sometimes, she said, he had even raised a hand to her. He had hit her on some nights. "Oh but I put up with him," she sniffed to the audience of young men in blue, rapt and attentive as the idea of their responsibilities as protectors of the populace still fresh in their heads. "I put up with him; I can't raise my daughter on my wages alone." The younger of the policemen cast his eyes briefly at the wisp of a girl with vacant eyes, fiddling with a color magazine and turning

its pages on the living room floor. A sorrow stirred in him, and lingered as they left to return to the station, muttering about the case as they climbed into the car.

But had Oscar's wife been thrifty, her wages from selling skin care products and jewelry, would have been enough to raise her daughter alone. Oscar had brought this up the night before, still human, no less withered and stooped then he was as a plant. It had been his first slip; the first time he came to put what came to his mind as words to be spoken and heard, instead of the usual passive grunts when he would submit, exhaustedly, to his wife's very loud, very threatening wheedling. It was the first time he refused her, and she had responded, scathingly, "You call yourself a man? You're an old, limp vegetable!" But it was only when she mentioned their daughter that the sparks of rebellion died in Oscar, and he felt wilted once again, promising half his monthly paycheck, and the recent bonus his boss gave him. He had stroked his chin, mulling over the insult, watching his daughter with her vacant eyes staring at the television set, thankful that her condition prevented her from realizing that she had a weak, good-for-nothing father. If only he had enough time to stay at home, with this poor girl whom he loved, but sometimes he wondered if they were strangers both, far away from each other and never meeting. He wished to be an ornament then, constant and steadfast, and thought he heard the heavens giving their consent, applauding him, with the sudden arrival of rain.

The search for Oscar continued for days; at one point, the company where he had worked, financed a search for him, with his boss and the CEO coming over for a visit to lend the poor, distraught wife their sympathies. They had known nothing of his violent behavior, and he had come across, to them at least, as a meek, mild-mannered old man who did his job well, and that had been all they cared about. They thought it proper to extend an envelope containing a sum of money, passed around the office a day prior with a note about the daughter with the illness. They left with plump hearts, convinced of their own sincerity.

By then, Oscar had flourished somewhat, his leaves glossy with nutrients. Once in a while, small butterflies would rest with him before continuing on in search of prettier gardens, and at night, the moths heavy with fur hid from hungry bats beneath his leaves. One time, his daughter climbed onto the windowsill with him and planted an earthworm in his pot of soil, and Oscar welcomed its friendly intrusion with plant-like mirth.

"Why is she so dirty, Yaya? Did you let her out into the garden?" Oscar's wife shrieked. She was very rarely home these days, eliciting the sympathies of friends and neighbors, so adept at it that she gave up her previous job of selling soap in favor of selling tears. The maid, young and new and idle as she was in a house, without both her bosses, had taken to letting the small child loose in the garden while she went neighboring, exchanging chatter with the maids of other households. Oscar would sense a deep looming loneliness.

Ever so often his daughter would come into the house and feed herself handfuls of mushed banana, sitting on the windowsill with him, as if feebly aware of his transformation. She said nothing. She had always been a quiet child; unnervingly so, from birth, and had only learned to speak when forced to in the special school she went to before and after summers. When she took a nip at one of his leaves or tentatively dug a few fingers in the soil, Oscar would recollect, briefly, how her stillness disturbed and saddened him. He would also feel a kind of delicious warmth that his former internal organs and human capabilities had denied him. But now he understood her predilection and they would sit together in silence, weighed down with unknowing, but also with mutual affection.

All the money ran out within months—the donations in envelopes and the amounts on deposit slips. The comfort of money was a false security, and without Oscar, his wife knew she would be reduced to nothing in a matter of weeks. She became a fixture at the police precinct and local radio stations, pleading into the mic for a husband she secretly wished would not return, and a daughter she openly used to gather pity. Oscar would recognize her voice, bristling with the strange residual human emotion he knew was called guilt. Whatever it was that had remained of the human Oscar in his plantly incarnation struggled against his cellulose skin, and as it rained again that night, he was awash with regret. A great pungent pain surged through him like a current, resting on his leaves that were closest to the soil. These soon felt alien, like they were no longer a part of him, a series of dead extremities that, as dawn broke, sloughed off of him like a dead shell. Oscar found no relief when the sun finally came out; the maid had come up to the plant on the windowsill to splash it with half a *tabo* of water as she did every morning, and discovered earthy bills pressed into the newly moistened soil. She backed off a couple of steps, saw that a handful of them had made it to the floor, and in her grand astonishment could only think of screaming, "*Ate*! *Ate*! *Ate*!" in varying pitches, scurrying in small circles.

"What in god's green graces are you screaming about?" Oscar's wife screamed back. But the maid was not to be silenced. Emboldened by the strangeness, she tugged and pulled and were it physically possible, would have thrashed her *Ate* about, babbling incoherently and pointing. Oscar's wife soon pieced the signals together, and reacted with even more screams.

And that was how the nationwide search for Oscar was abruptly discontinued, and all investigations halted. The sorrowful wife declared that, unfortunately, she had to give up, and return home with a heavy heart. She was careful of all outward appearances, and had the maid swear on her life, to secrecy. The money tree was to be their salvation. However withered and ugly it was, it was so greedily guarded that they sought no expertise on its peculiar shedding of money—actual cash, genuine bills—caring naught about myths and legends and the implications of an actual money-bearing plant. This money tree was a gift, and that was all it was.

Oscar shared in this disbelief, but he derived no pleasure from this new ability. He found himself constantly and indiscriminately sprayed with pesticide, its irritating bitterness tainting his daily nourishment. His peaceful tenant the earthworm, who Oscar had grown very fond of, was murdered one day with pliers, cast aside with his lesser leaves, whose only fault were not being as vividly green as the others. The butterflies and moths stopped visiting him, their feet and tongues burned by the persistent chemicals; and now not even aphids or ants, whose company Oscar readily welcomed, dared come near. By now it seemed that the only person who shared in his distress was his little daughter, who let out a whimper as she took the pieces of dead earthworm and buried them in the garden.

Nevertheless, Oscar would continue to shed, as if on schedule, twice a month, and at times his wife would pause in her retail therapy to harbor thoughts of this strange schedule as being eerily similar to when her lost husband would hand over his paychecks. It was at these times that she was at the very verge of realizing that her husband and the plant were connected in some way, but it was too fanciful a thought to dwell on, and she would quickly forget, too devotedly immersed in the tending of things she thought actually mattered, like a new paint job, so that the house could stand out among the hovels her neighbors called houses, or transforming the garden into a veranda where she could host friends.

Oscar, meanwhile, found himself dozing longer and longer, subsiding deeper and deeper into the indifference of plants. The movement of humans seemed quicker to him now; their voices a shrill and steady thrum reaching him in waves, intensified by the wind. Everything else seemed like a haze. The only things slow or still enough were objects that had remained what they had been longer than he had been a plant—the house, the furniture, the garden, the prickling of new grass, the grim intensity of the acacia in the neighbor's yard. The only things that mattered now, were the welcome heat of the sun, the acknowledgement of rain, and the consistency of the air. Once or twice though, he would come to, and almost regain that old platform of consciousness, of being, of human-ness, but it would be gone in an instant, swift as a passing thought. He grew more oblivious to the growing tensions at home, but in the rare times that he sensed them, he chose to overlook them. He would only catch on-almost readily-whenever his daughter touched him, stroked a leaf, or moved around the soil with her fingers. She could not visit him as often as she pleased, though, as the tending, caring for, and harvesting of the miraculous money tree belonged to Oscar's wife and the maid. Whenever the girl tried, she would be pushed away, led outside into the garden to occupy herself with other plants. On rare visits, in the dead of night, she would manage to speak to him, a word or two, and Oscar despaired at the loss of the gift of sentience, for he was not able to hear, only *feel* in low, significant vibrations in the air, what his daughter was trying to say.

Twice a month, Oscar's wife and the maid would take the plant into the kitchen, and seal all the doors and windows, and begin harvesting. Oscar would be roused from his plantly reverie, fully conscious about the gathering of money; it was the only time they were gentle with him. On these days his wife and the maid would talk about the bills, about renovations and new things to replace the old things that needed repairing; Oscar would recall conversations like this from a time that seemed to him so very long ago, from which he was always excluded, because of his weakness with calculations and aversion to the luxury of new things. They were all just words to him now, a dull thrumming in the air as the two women went about their business. It would only be a matter of time before they set him back on his peaceful windowsill and he would drop out of their callow world once more. It was something that he could live with; after all, did they not only bother him twice a month? Did they not always return him to his place by the window, with the sun and the rain?

It was an arrangement that benefited everyone except the little girl. In the flurry of new excitements she was the house's lowest priority. Her mother would leave it up to the maid to care for her, and the maid, giddy with her new freedom, would assume that her *Ate* was in charge of the child, and would abandon her duties to cavort with the water boys and *istambays* of the neighborhood. It could easily be imagined that one day she would run off with one of them, never to return, and later tell her grand-children wild stories about plants.

The little girl would only ever be fed whenever the two older women would remember to eat, or cook, or bring home a meal, and that was not so very often, as they felt nourished by and content with merely buying new things. At times the little girl would venture a taste of the mulch that had accumulated in Oscar's clay pot while Oscar, aghast, tried to recall what he used to feed his daughter.

The day came when Oscar's wife discovered the little girl trying to eat Oscar's precious leaves, and she flew into such a panic that she pinched the girl's cheek until it drew blood. But the girl held dangerously on to the plant, throwing her thin little arms around the pot and thrusting her head against the stem as if to seek protection from beneath the leaves.

"You little *bruha*! You're going to break it!" shrieked the girl's mother. The commotion brought Oscar to his senses, the heaving and shaking and the confusion of what he knew to be voices, and a constriction around his being that he recognized as his daughter. It did not take long for him to understand, as much as a plant possibly could, and for a moment he thought he was to become human again with such a rage streaming through his boughs that he wanted to lash out, to protect the little girl, from his wife, the maid, the world, and he would feed her again, would care for her again. But there was nothing, and he was still a plant, motionless, thrashing inwardly to no avail until all the struggle around him ceased and all was silent again. Later he would sense the salt of his daughter's tears as they ran deep into the soil, the price of a wish fulfilled, the iron taste of it as it spreading swiftly through his roots, his stem, his leaves. He thought then that he should not forget, as he soaked up the bitter memory of this girl with the vacant eyes, and so with all his chlorophyllic strength he strained against his stillness, but there were no hands to reach out with no voice to speak with.

After a week of heavy rain, it was time for Oscar to shed again. He would shed at the break of dawn, and the women of the house would harvest at breakfast. If they did it too early and the money would crumble into soil.

Somehow it felt different this time. There was no sharp pain of his leaves drying up and falling. Instead there was a sweet tingling between his leaves and boughs and soon they grew heavy with a new weight.

Before light, his daughter who had managed to sneak out and visit him, found the strangest little fruit on the plant by the window, all in different stages of growth: some minute and edged with pleasantly green petals, some as large as grapes. She took one to put in her mouth, crushed it between her teeth, and the sweetness of it led her to reach for another, and another until all traces of the fruit Oscar bore were no more.

Soon he would remember nothing but the dawns in which he bore fruit; the rest of the time it would feel like a deep sleep stirred by faint dreams of faraway movements and voices. The deeper he slept, the less money he shed, the more fruit he bore. It did not take long for Oscar's wife to notice, blaming it on the expensive brand of pesticide or the lack of sunlight, and later on, the maid whom she accused of stealing, and the child, whom she accused of eating the bills, until there was no one and nothing left to blame. Eventually she was persuaded to return to selling beauty projects and to postpone the renovations to a later date.

Little did anyone notice, the fruit that grew in place of the money, for it grew in the dark, in the middle of the night, whenever the daughter would come. And every time, whenever she visited him, her speech grew steadier, her fingers quicker. She would now dare wait until the fruit ripened before picking, and if she caught a stirring in one of the rooms she would hide them to eat later in the day. They loosened her joints, put strength in her bones, and over the course of a month her eyes began to betray signs of life, darting from one object to another. Her stares grew a little less vacant day by day.

At times, she would speak quietly to him about plants. Oscar could not understand a word, but the feel of her breath comforted him. Everything was a dream now, vacant, distant dreams that meant nothing to the great deep slumber of plants, a sleeping forever present, with no memories or thoughts of the future. But she would speak to him still, turn the soil until it was moist and pleasant and soft.

One morning, barely morning, as it was dark still, and a slight fog hung over the city, Oscar felt his daughter climb onto the windowsill, an uneven shudder, and a warm, faint breeze that was her breath as she spoke to him again, from so far away it might have been the wind in the leaves of another tree. But with the last that remained of what made him the Oscar who had fathered this girl who stayed awake and rapt, as she told him stories of men that turned into plants, feeling his soil turned again and again by the knowing warmth of small hands, he drifted farther and farther away settling forever into a blissful sleep not unlike death, but still very much within the reach of life, a different life, a different world ...

Daga

Mark Angeles

aulinigan niya ang boses ng tatay niya mula sa kabilang kuwarto. Makunat ang tunog na dumarating sa kaniya. Nasasala marahil ng playwud na pader ang boses ng tatay niya.

Pinagagalitan siya ng tatay niya. Hinahanap sa kaniya ang lason sa daga na bilin nitong bilhin niya. Ang siste, walang mabibiling tingi noon sa tindahan. Hindi tulad ng mantika o shampoo.

"Aray!" usal niya. Kinagat ng anak niya ang kaniyang utong.

Wala na siguro itong masuso. Tuyot na tuyot na ang mga dibdib niya. Sinabihan siyang bumili ng malunggay ng kapitbahay. Pamparami raw ng gatas ng ina. Pero kapag nagluluto siya ng tinola, pati ito ay sinisimot ng tatay niya.

"Halika rito," tawag ng tatay niya.

Inalog-alog niya nang marahan ang kalong na sanggol at saka tumayo mula sa pagkakasalampak sa sahig. Unti-unting umalsa ang pinagmarkahan ng kaniyang mga hita at saka naglaho. Dahan-dahan niyang tinungo ang kumot na nakatali ang magkabilang dulo sa magkabilang kisame para maging duyan. Maingat niyang inilapag doon ang kaniyang anak na halata pang gutom sa wangis ng mukha. Hinele niya ang anak para maunahan ang nakaambang pag-iyak.

"Bilisan mo!" bulyaw ng tatay niya kahit nakita na siyang paparating.

Nakataas ang kaliwang braso ng tatay niya at akmang may iaabot kaya paglapit niya ay sinahod niya kaagad ang kamay nito. Nanginginig ang palad niya ngunit nahulaan na niyang iyon ay isang lukot na isandaan.

"Hayan!" sabi ng tatay niya. "Bumili ka ng lason sa daga!"

Naamoy niya ang alak sa hininga nito. Naulinigan din niya ang paghinga nito na sinilindro ng makapal na bigote.

Bumalik siya sa kuwartong kinalalagyan ng duyan. Maingat niyang kinuha ang anak at ipinatong ang ulo nito sa kaniyang balikat. Lumabas siya ng kuwarto at naglakad papunta sa pintuan. Alam niyang sa buong sandaling iyon ay sinusundan siya ng titig ng tatay niya.

Mabuti na lang at hindi umiyak ang anak niya. Kumatok siya sa kapitbahay. Nang bumukas ang pinto, sumalubong sa kaniya ang mukha ng isang babae. Napatingin ito sa kaniyang anak.

"Ginawa mo na ba ang sinabi ko?" usisa ng babae. Tungkol iyon sa pagkain ng malunggay.

Tumango siya.

"Paiwan po ulit," sabi niya sa babae.

"Sige." Kinuha ng babae ang sanggol na para bang isang bagaheng ilalagak sa baggage counter ng isang grocery store. Pagkatapos ay isinara ng babae ang pinto sa kaniyang mukha.

Tumalikod siya. Hindi na niya kailangang magpaliwanag. Ilang ulit na niyang ipinaalaga sa kapitbahay ang kaniyang anak.

Ilang kanto rin ang nilakad niya. Nakipagpatintero siya sa mga pawisang lalaking naglalaro ng basketbol. Takot na takot siya sa bola. Nadaanan niya ang isang tindahang gawa sa mesa at laman lang ay ilang garapong kendi at isang kahon ng mga sigarilyo. May ilang tambay na nakaupo sa gilid ng kanal. May ilang batang nanghuhuli ng butete.

Pumasok siya sa isang maliit na grocery habang hinahabol ng tingin ng guwardiya. Pumunta siya sa estante ng mga pamatay-ipis at daga. Sinipat niya ang mga kahon ng lason sa daga at pinili ang pinakamura. Kailangan talagang bilhin ang buong kahon. Binulong niya sa sarili na sana ay may makaisip na magtingi.

Binayaran niya ang kahon sa kahera. Kinuha niya ang sukli.

Habang palabas ng grocery, inisip niya kung ano ang mabibili sa napagsuklian. Maaari siyang bumili ng malunggay. Pumunta siya sa dako ng palengke kung saan naroon ang hilera ng mga tindang gulay.

Palinga-linga siya para maghanap ng malunggay. Nahagip ng tingin niya ang dahon ng ampalaya. Naalala niya ang sinabi ng isa pang kapitbahay. Para hindi na raw hanapin ng sanggol ang gatas niya, pigaan niya ng dahon ng ampalaya ang paligid ng utong niya. Naisip niya, masasanay naman sa am ang anak niya. Nagduda lang siya nang maalala ang balita sa health center. Dati-rati kasi dalawang beses isang buwan ang pagbibigay ng bitamina para sa mga bata. Ngayon ay isang beses, isang buwan na lang dahil sa dalang ng dating ng mga gamot.

Binili niya ang dahon ng ampalaya.

Hawak niya ang lason sa daga at dahon ng ampalaya sa daan pauwi. Habang naglalakad, maraming alaalang bumabalik sa isip niya. Halimbawa na ang huling bilin sa kaniya ng nanay niya bago ito sumakay ng taxi papunta sa airport. Naalala rin niya ang gabing nagising siya at katabi na ang tatay niya. Nagulat siya dahil para itong humihikbi. Nangumpisal ito sa kaniya. Nami-miss daw nito ang nanay niya. Naguluhan siya sa gagawin pero hinayaan niya lang na suklayin nito ng daliri ang buhok niya. Hinayaan niya lang na simsimin nito ang buhok niya.

Ilang linggo pagkatapos, nangasim ang tiyan niya. Naalala niya kung paano siya bambuhin ng tatay niya para paaminin kung sino sa mga kaklase niya ang gumawa noon. Sobrang lakas ng boses ng tatay niya at dinig ito ng mga kapitbahay. Nagkakahulan ang mga aso sa labas.

Mabuti na lang at may awa ang mga kapitbahay niya at tinulungan siya sa pagbubuntis niya. Hanggang sa lumabas sa sangmaliwanag ang dinala niya sa sinapupunan.

Muntik na siyang masagasaan sa pagbabalik ng mga alaala. Nagising ang diwa niya nang businahan ng isang kotse at murahin ng drayber nito. Maraming nakamata sa kaniya. Dali-dali siyang naglakad pauwi.

Kumatok siya sa pintuan ng kapitbahay. Pagbukas ng pinto, lumabas ang babae dala ang anak niya. Nagulat ito sa hawak niya. Pero nahulaan na rin siguro nito na ayaw na niyang magpasuso kaya hindi na rin ito umimik. Ipinasa sa mga braso niya ang anak niya.

Pagdating niya sa bahay ay wala ang tatay niya. Umupo siya sa sahig at inilapag sa tabi niya ang hawak na mga pinamili. Nagsimulang umatungal ang anak niya. Nililis niya ang laylayan ng damit niya para ilabas ang kanang suso. Narinig niya ang sutsot ng mga daga sa ilalim ng sahig kung saan nakatayo ang kanilang barumbarong.

Binuksan niya ang kahon ng lason sa daga. Dinurog niya ang mga butil ng lason at ipinahid ito sa paligid ng utong niya. Inilapit niya sa dibdib ang umaapuhap na bibig ng anak.

Kuwerdas

(Bersiyong Tagpuang Espanya)

Nonon Villaluz Carandang

lay kay Andrés Segovia (1893-1987), musikerong Kastila, ang pinakamahalagang gitaristang klasikal ng ika-20 daantaon, na siyang muling nagpakilala sa gitara bilang isang instrumentong pangkonsiyerto.

Madalas marinig mula sa ikalawang palapag ng gusaling ladrilyo ang musika ng maestro. Napapatigil upang makapakinig ang sinumang makaririnig nito. Madalas niyang bigyang-buhay ang awit ng mga Iberiko, lalo na ang himig-Andalusia ng Sevilla, Cadiz, at Granada. May kakayahan itong patahimikin ang mga nagtatalong tindero at mamimili o mga nagdedebateng kalalakihan sa plaza lalo sa dapithapon. Marami ang naghahakahaka na ang gitara ay sinasapian ng kaluluwa ng kanilang ninuno upang makipag-usap at makihalubilo sa mamamayang maaaring nakalilimot. Kung minsan, mismong ang alkalde pa ang bumibisita at nagdadala ng sariling upuan para lamang makinig sa pagtugtog ng maestro. Matagal nang nagretiro ang maestro sa unibersidad at pagtatanghal.

Dating nagturo ang maestro bagaman marami sa kaniyang mag-aaral sa unibersidad ay natuto para lamang matupad ang ambisyong maging tanyag, makapagliwaliw sa ibang bayan at magkaroon ng magandang kabuhayan. Ito ang palaging inaasam ng mga nais matuto ng gitara lalo't kakaunti lamang ang nakapagpapatunog nito na may angking kapangyarihan at pangungusap. Subalit naging bukambibig ng maestro sa kaniyang magaaral na may hanggahan ang kaniyang turo at kung pipilitin pang kunin ang natitira niyang kaalaman ay pipiliin na niya ang tuturuan na nararapat lamang na may tikas at busilak na kalooban. Simula pa noon, wala pang nakapagsasabing siya ang nakaaalam ng lahat ng dunong at nakapagmana ng kapangyarihan ng pagtugtog ng gitara ng maestro. At mula noon, nakilala rin ang maestro sa paghahanap niya ng mapagpapasahan ng kaniyang kakayahan, ngunit bigo siya hanggang sa sumapit ang isang hapon ng linggo ng tag-araw.

Nagdaan ang binatilyong si Antonio, matapos niyang kunin mula sa bayan ang lambat na gamit sa pangingisda. Pasan niya ang bulto ng lambat nang mapansin niyang gumagaan ito habang napapakinggan niya ang tugtog pagdaan sa gusali ng maestro. Noon lang niya narinig ang ganoong musika at tanging ang sigaw lamang ng mga langay-langayan at tagak ang kaniyang napapakinggan sa kanilang lugar. Lumaki sa pamamalaka si Antonio hanggang sa siya ay maulila sa magulang at matutong mag-isa sa bahay na kahit na sino ay walang nakabisita o nagtangkang dumalaw. Saksi ang Guadalquivir sa kaniyang paglaki bilang isang tahimik, marangal, at maginoong lalaki. Tanging ang mga prayle sa Katedral malapit sa Torre del Oro ang nakapagturo kay Antonio ng pagsulat at pagbilang.

Mula noon, madalas niyang abangan ang pagtugtog ng maestro. Naging palagiang upuan na niya ang tuod ng natumbang puno sa harap ng gusali ng maestro. Ilang ulit niyang binalik-balikan ang musika hanggang sa maisipan niyang kilalanin ang lumilikha nito. Pinaghandaan niya ang pagdalaw sa gusali ng maestro. Nais niyang matutong maggitara upang malibang ang sarili sa pinakatahimik na oras sa kaniyang tahanang malapit sa daungan.

Umaga nang dalhin niya ang piling kanduli, biya, at karpa para sa magiging kaibigan niyang musikero. Nilakad niyang baon ang pag-asang makikipagkilala ang maestro sa kaniya at papayag itong maturuan siyang mapaawit ang instrumentong may anim na kuwerdas. Narating niya ito bago pa mananghalian at ilang sandali rin siyang nanubok sa harap ng gusali. Minatyagan niya kung naroroon ang kaniyang hinahanap, nang bumukas ang pinto ng gusali at lumabas ang matandang lalaki upang iwan sa labas ang isang bungkos ng lumang babasahin at ilang bote ng gatas. Inaayos nito ang mga bote nang lumapit si Antonio.

"Señor, magandang umaga po. Ako po si Antonio, isang mangingisda," bungad ng binatilyo. At mataman siyang tiningnan ng maestro upang mapansin ang buslo na naglalaman ng mga isda. "Malamang na mangingisda ka nga. Kayo na lamang ang gumagamit ng buslo para sa inyong huli. Bakit?" ang tugon ng maestrong, nakatutok ang pagtingin na pinalilinaw ng kaniyang salamin. May kaliitan ito kung kaya't kinailangan pa nitong bahagyang tumingala para masipat ang maamong mukha ng binatilyo.

"Nais ko pong maging kaibigan ninyo at matutong gamitin ang gitara," dagdag pa ni Antonio.

"Hindi ginagamit ang gitara, iho. Ikaw ang gagamitin nito para sa musika. Nagkakamali ka sa pagkilala mo sa gitara," napakunot ng noo ang matanda na parang nayayamot sa binatilyo.

"Paumanhin po. Hindi ko po nais na maging bihasa at tanyag o maging mayaman sa paraang makapagbigay ng musikang panggitara," paliwanag ni Antonio na may pag-aalinlangan kung dapat pang ipagpatuloy ang pakikipag-usap sa matanda. Naisip niyang hindi ito ang tamang oras para kausapin ang maestro.

"May ibabayad ka? Hindi ako nagtuturo para lang malibang ang sino man," may tono ng pagmamataas ang narinig ni Antonio.

"A, ganu'n po ba? Maraming salamat na lamang po," iniabot ni Antonio ang buslo at saka ito nagpaalam sa matanda. Nanatiling nasa labas ang matanda hanggang mawala sa kaniyang paningin ang lalaking hukot na naglakad papalayo. Napailing ito nang pumasok sa kaniyang tirahan.

Ilang dapithapon ang nakalipas, at nagkasiya na lamang sa pakikinig ang binatilyo sa hinahangaang musikero. Alam niyang hanggang dito na lamang ang kaniyang magagawa para maranasan ang musikang nagpapaliwanag sa kaniya ng sari-saring damdamin at kaisipan. At sa bawat pagtipa ng kuwerdas ng maestro ay lalo pang sumisidhi ang kaniyang pagnanais na maranasan at matutuhan ito, hanggang sa isang hapon ay wala na siyang narinig. Lumapit siya sa pintuan at akmang kakatukin ito nang kaniyang awatin ang sarili at tumalikod na lamang. Bantulot siyang mapahiyang muli sa matanda. Papalayo na siya nang magbukas ang pinto at lumabas ang matanda.

"Hindi ka nagsasawa. Paulit-ulit lamang naman ang tunog ng kuwerdas ng gitara ko," ang pakli ng maestro. Tumugot sa paglakad ang binatilyo at nadama niya ang isang tuwa.

"Masarap makinig sa inyong musika na 'di matutumbasan ng kahit na magkanong halaga. Lumilipas ang bawat sandali ngunit naiiwan ang tunog at alingawngaw nito sa aking isipan," ang sagot ni Antonio na aral sa turo ng mga prayle.

"Masarap kasi ang karpa at kanduli, sapat lamang na pagandahin ng gitara ang tunog para sa nagbigay nito. Bukas, magbalik ka. Subukan nating turuan kang maggitara," ang utos ng maestrong hindi man lamang kumurap. Hinihintay nito ang isasagot ng binatilyong may magaspang na kamay, matipunong pangangatawan at mulatong balat. Napalingon ang binatilyo at tumakbong pabalik sa maestro upang lumuhod at magmano tanda ng kaniyang labis na kasiyahan, pasasalamat at paggalang.

Kinabukasan, narating niya ang gusali ng maestro habang nakangiti ang araw sa Jardines de Alcazar. Pinapasok siya nito at iniabot niya ang buslong naglalaman ng banak at karpa. Tahimik ang buong kabahayan. Mag-isa lamang ang maestro sa tahanang may ilang kagamitang yari sa matitigas na kahoy ng Sevilla at Cordoba. Napansin niya ang ilang diploma at sertipiko mula sa unibersidad na nagpapatunay na minsang naging guro ang matanda rito.

"Nag-iisa po kayo sa bahay?"

"Oo. Tanging ang pamangkin ko ang siyang dumadalaw tuwing linggo para dalhan ako ng pagkain at ang aking pension mula sa unibersidad. Pero hindi 'yan ang sadya mo."

"Paumanhin po."

Nagsimula siyang turuan ng maestro sa pamamagitan ng paghawak ng walis at lampaso para linisin ang buong kabahayang naglalaman ng agiw, alikabok at sari-saring basura. Nagtataka man si Antonio ay isinagawa niya ang iniutos ng matanda habang ito ay naiidlip sa kaniyang silid. Napagod siya sa paglilinis kaya't napaupo na lamang siya at inilapat ang likuran sa sandalan. Napaidlip siya ng ilang sandali nang magising siya sa pahayag ng matandang guro.

"Ang mga daliri sa kaliwang kamay ang didiin sa mga kuwerdas para magkaroon ng tamang tono samantalang ang mga daliri naman sa kanang kamay ang siyang titipa upang patunugin ito sa tamang bagsak at angat sunod sa bilis ng awitin. Alamin mo ang tamang paghawak, pagtipa at pagkalabit sa mga kuwerdas. Magpakilala ka sa gitara at makikilala mo rin ito."

Matiyagang pinag-aralan ni Antonio ang gitara, mula sa payak na pag-angat at pagbaba ng tono gamit ang kords at ang mga pangunahing metodo ng pagpapalakas, pagpapahina, pagpapataginting ng tunog nito. Ipinagkaloob sa kaniya ng maestro ang ilang aklat na binabasa niya matapos siyang mamalakaya sa madaling araw at kung nagpapahinga sa gabi. Unti-unting dumami at naging makapal ang tunog ng gitarang pinahiram sa kaniya ng maestro. Nakilala na nga niya ang gitara subalit tila kulang ito sa kapangyarihan.

"Ang bawat kuwerdas ay may tunog ayon sa kapal nito. Bawat isa ay nakagapos mula sa katawan ng gitara na siyang nagpapalakas at nagpapaugong dito. Dapat mapanatili mo at maging sensitibo ang tono kung ito ay nagbabago ayon sa panahon, kung taglamig o tag-init. May katangian ang kahoy na siyang bumabanat ng kuwerdas, alamin mo ang ugali nito. Ang bawat tunog ay may kulay, madilim man o maliwanag, at may mensahe na dapat maibahagi sa nakikinig. Kayong dalawa ng iyong gitara ang nag-uusap dito. At ang gitara lamang ang pinakamalapit at nakaririnig sa tibok ng iyong puso."

Ilang ulit na nagpalit ng hugis ang buwan at patuloy pa rin ang pagaaral ni Antonio. Araw-araw niyang kasama ang gitara at mga aklat. Si Antonio ang madalas na nagpapakawala ng mga awiting nakapagpapalugod ng kaluluwa ng sinumang makapapakinig. Ilang haka-haka na ang nabuo na si Antonio ang huling mag-aaral ng maestro at sa kaniya ihahabilin ang lahat ng kaalaman nito. May ilan din namang nagsasabing tulad din siya ng iba pang mag-aaral ng maestro na hangad lamang ang katanyagan at kayamanan. Nagkaroon pa nga ng mga pagkakataong may kumakatok din sa maestro para magpaturo subalit ito'y kaniyang tinatanggihan. Nasaksihan ng matanda ang paghusay ng binatilyo at alam niyang darating ang panahong dapat niyang paghabilinan ito.

Umaga nang ang hangin ay banayad na umiihip sa pampang ng ilog na nagpapayuko sa mga talahib nang kunin ng maestro ang kaniyang gitara at patunugin ito. Nasa pintuan na ng gusali si Antonio nang marinig niya ito. Kakaiba ang tunog. Napapaiyak nito ang gitara na nagpapahiwatig ng pagyao.

Pumasok ang binatilyong mangingisda at natagpuan niya ang matandang matamang hinahaplos ang kuwerdas ng kaniyang gitara. Tumigil ang matanda sa kaniyang pagtugtog, tumayo ito at tahimik na nilapitan ang mesitang naglalaman ng dalawang kopita at isang boteng alak na sherry mula sa Jerez de la Frontera. Tinagayan niya ang binatilyo at kanilang pinagsaluhan ang alak. Nagtataka man, hindi na nakuha pang magtanong ng binatilyo.

"Antonio, maaaring natutuhan mo na ang lahat matapos ang higit sa dalawampu't apat na buwan nang halos araw-araw na pagsasanay sa ilalim ng aking paggabay. Alam kong mahirap nang alisin sa iyo ang kakayahan at kagalingan sa bagay na ito. Nakabaon na ito sa iyong kaluluwa," ang mensahe ng matanda para sa binatilyo na nagsasabing sumapit na ang araw ng pagtatapos ng pag-aaral nito. At nilagok pa nila ang alak at saka tinanganan ng matanda ang gitarang ginagamit nang kung ilang taon at ipinagkatiwala ito kay Antonio. Ito raw ang huling aral niya, ang matutuhang pag-ingatan ang gitarang ilang taon ding kasa-kasama ng maestro. Nagliwanag ang mukha ni Antonio na para bang hindi makapaniwala sa nangyayari.

"Salamat po," ang matipid na tugon ni Antonio sapagkat napakahirap hagilapin ang salitang dapat niyang sabihin sa pagkakataong iyon.

Maligamgam pa ang gitara at sa kaniyang unang paghawak dito ay nadama niya ang pag-ugong nito.

"Tulad ng balalaika ng mga Ruso, ipagdiwang mo ang pag-ibig. Tulad ng 'ud ng mga taga-Ehipto, ibulong mo ang kapayapaan. Tulad ng sitar ng India, pagsayawin mo ang hangin at ang ulan. Tulad ng qin ng Tsina, lingunin mo ang libong taon na lumipas. Tulad ng kora ng Gambia na may 21 kuwerdas, pagyamanin mo ang tunog nito nang higit pa rito. At gaya rin ng shamisen ng mga Hapones, gayahin mo ang makulay na pagsasadula ng buhay at ang kaniyang mga aral. Hayaan mong dalawin ka ng iyong musa at iwan sa iyo ang basbas at kahit pa ang sumpa," naupo ang matanda at ngumiti sa kaniya sa unang pagkakataon.

Umuwi siyang umaapaw ang kasiyahan, higit pa sa ilang araw na maraming huling isda sa ilog. Iniwan na niya ang pinahiram na gitara sa maestro, upang magpakilala sa bagong instrumentong makakasama. Sinimulan niya ang pagtugtog habang umiihip ang hanging nagmumula sa Sierra Navada at Morena na nagpapasayaw sa mga liryo at lily. Abuhingasul ang kalawakang binudburan ng bituin at lumulutang ang malaplatong buwan.

Dumilat ang araw at ginising siya ng batingaw ng Giralda. Ito ang unang pagkakataong narinig niyang tumunog ang kampanaryo ng katedral. Naghanda siya para dalawin ang maestro bago siya mamalakaya. Nilakad niya ang mga kalyeng patungo sa gusali ng maestro. Narating niya ang tirahan at kinatok ito nang makailang ulit. Walang nagbukas. Kinutuban na siya kung kaya't binalya niya ang matibay na pintuang kahoy nito ngunit hindi ito natinag sa pagkakapinid. Lumapit ang isang matandang babaeng nakabandana.

"Iho, natagpuan kagabi ng pamangkin na walang buhay ang maestro. Kaaalis lamang nila upang dalhin ang bangkay sa Cadiz," sabay ang pagaantanda ng krus sa dibdib.

"Saan po ba sa Cadiz?" pahabol na tanong ni Antonio habang naglalakad palayo ang matandang babae.

"Malawak, anak, ang Cadiz. Mabuting hintayin mo na lamang silang makabalik," ang tugon ng nanginginig na tinig ng matandang babaeng may kabagalan sa paglakad. Umuwi siya nang may baong kalungkutan sa dibdib.

Agad niyang kinuha ang gitara at pinatugtog ang maikling awit habang nakatingin sa pag-agos ng dalisay na ilog na alam niyang madaraanan o patungo sa maestro. Ipinahatid niya sa tubig ang ponebreng sinlungkot ng pagluluksa para sa isang ama at gurong pumanaw. At sumandal siya sa haliging kahoy ng daungan at saka umidlip. Niyakap niya ang gitarang pamana ng musikerong kaniyang hinangaan nang kumutan ng ulap ang langit at mabalot ng hamog ang paligid. Sumibol ang mga bulaklak sa puno ng oliba, mansanas at peras sa paligid at lumabas ang dalawang musang nakadamit ng mahabang ginintuang bestida at may koronang lilak, hasmin, at rosas. Nakangiti nilang nilapitan ang mahimbing na si Antonio ay binigkas ang basbas at sumpa.

"Basbas namin ang pag-ibig at kaligayahan. At iiwan din ang sumpa na kung sinuman ang magpaparaya at magsasakripisyo ng kaniyang buhok bilang pamalit sa kuwerdas ay makikitil at panghabangbuhay na lilikha ng awit sa gitara. Ito ay patunay ng tunay na pag-ibig. Maganap nawa gaya ng naganap sa maestro ng maestro."

At nagising si Antonio habang bumabangga-bangga ang kaniyang nakataling bangka sa haligi ng daungan. Tumayo siya at pumasok sa bahay. Nag-awitan ang mga kuliglig sa saliw ng kaniyang gitarang may pangako ng pag-ibig at kaligayahan.

At sumapit ang taglagas at taglamig na tanging ang gitara lamang ang kaniyang kasa-kasama. Walang sawa niya itong pinatutunog araw-araw, kahit pa unti-unting naging kulay lupa ang paligid at nagsimulang pumatak ang niyebe. Ang gitara ng maestro ang nagpapainit sa kaniyang taglamig at nagbigay-aliw sa kaniyang lumbay. Bagaman, maikli ang taglamig sa panahon iyon. Mabilis na natunaw ang niyebe at nagsimulang maging lungtian ang paligid. Namukadkad ang mga tagitis at aster. Nagbalik na ang mga ibon at muling naglangoy ang mga isda sa ilog. Mabango ang samyo ng hangin, kaya't buong sipag niyang inihanda ang bangka at lambat para mamalakaya. Masagana ang huli. Isang pagpapala ng musa.

May ilang linggo na ang lumipas mula nang bisitahin niya ang gusali ng maestro. Nagpasiya siyang magtungo rito kahit na wala na ang kaniyang guro. Naglakad siya sa malamig at mamasa-masang lupa at tisang daan ng mga kalye. Nakasabit sa kaniyang balikat ang gitara. Umuusok pa ang ilang tsiminea na nagpapainit sa ilang kabahayan kahit pa maligamgam na ang sikat ng araw. Hindi ito tulad ng gusali ng maestro, kung saan nakapinid ang mga bintana at nakaaldaba ang pintuan, at walang senyales ng anumang taong naninirahan doon. Pinagmasdan niya ang gusali at nagbalik ang ilang alaala. Naglakad siya papalayo patungo sa Plaza de España upang mamahinga at maglibang sa mga taong sabik sa init ng araw. Naroroon ang ilang taong nagbabakasakaling makapangangalakal ng kanilang produktong keso, butil, tabako, alak, at karne. Naglakad si Antonio hanggang Makita niya ang isang bangkô. Naupo siya rito at saka niya sinimulang haranahin ang paligid gamit ang kaniyang kuwerdas. Ito ang unang pagkakataong napatugtog ang gitara sa parke. Marami ang nakarinig at napatingin sa binatilyong musikero. Nasa kaniya na ang katangiang taglay ng balalaika, sitar, qin, shamisen, 'ud, at kora.

Sa tagsibol, ang pamimitas ng mga ligaw na kabute at damo ang libangan ni Clarita. Naroroon sa parke ang balingkinitang dalagang may mahabang buhok na halos umabot sa lupa. Nagmula ang kaniyang pamilya sa Tangier, Morocco bagaman siya at ang kaniyang dalawa pang kapatid ay iniluwal at namalagi nang ilang taon sa Huelva. Nilisan nila ito dahil pangangalakal ng pananim ang nais ng kanilang magulang.

Narinig ni Clarita ang nakaaakit na tunog ng gitara. Nangungusap ang musika at hinihikayat siya upang hanapin at kilalanin ang musikero. Kumakandirit at pasayaw siyang umikot sa plaza. Hinihipan ng hangin ang kaniyang malasutla at kulay kapeng buhok habang umiindak siya sa malikot na ritmo ng flamenco. Pumapadyak ang kaniyang mga paa at umiindayog ang mga brasong tila pamaypay ang kamay at daliring nakapilatik sa pag-ikot. Ipinapagpag din niya ito sa hangin na para bang hinahamon ang pinakamatikas na toro sa koleseyo. Naglapitan at nangagpanood ang maraming tao. Sabik sila sa ganitong husay ng libangang sining. At nakita ni Antonio ang mahusay at mapanuksong sayaw ng dalaga. Nakasintas sa kaniyang palda ang mga kabute at ilang ligaw na damo at nakabalabal ang isang pulang sedang may burloloy at may burdang pangalang Clarita. Napako ang tingin ni Antonio sa dalaga. Lumapit ito sa kaniya at nagpaikot-ikot sa bangkóng kaniyang inuupuan. Namasdan niya ang mukha nitong may matalim-mapungay na mata, munting ilong na inukit sa mukhang hugispuso. Manipis ang kaniyang labing kulay rosas at mahaba ang leeg na may nagbabantay na dalawang buto sa ilalim ng balikat. Pumapalakpak pa siya sa patapos na bahagi ng tugtog at nakapalibot na sa kanilang dalawa ang mga taong saksi sa pagtatagpo ng mananayaw at musikero.

Hinihingal man ang dalawa, kanilang pinasalamatan ang mga pumalakpak at naghiyawan sa galing ng kanilang tambalan. May ilan pang nag-amot ng barya sa kanila. Naupo ang babae sa tabi ng gitarista habang tumatawa at palagay ang loob na para bang matagal na silang magkakilala.

"Ako si Clarita. Mahusay ka. Matagal na akong di nakaririnig at nakasasayaw ng flamenco," ang panimulang pahayag ng dalagang estranghero.

"Antonio. Salamat." Walang maisip na isagot ang gitarista.

"Saan ka nakatira?" At nagpatuloy na ang isang biglaang kumbersasyong nagpainit sa malamig na umagang yaon. Nalaman ni Antonio ang lahat ukol sa babae, pati pa ang paninirahan nito kasama ang pamilya sa loob ng isang karuwahe. Doon nagsimula ang kanilang pagkikita tuwing umaga. Ito ang pumalit sa nakasanayang pagdalaw ni Antonio sa maestro. Ipinagdadala pa nga ng binatilyo ang dalaga ng sariwang karpa. Madalas pa nga silang hilinging magtanghal ng mga tao sakaling mamataan sila sa plaza. Naging balita ang husay nila, hanggang sa pati ang alkalde ay sinadya sila at pinabuksan ang entablado sa parke para doon sila magtanghal. Makapangyarihan ang gitara lalo't sa bawat pagtunog nito ay lalo silang napapalapit sa isa't isa.

Hinahanap na nila ang isa't isa, pagsikat pa lang ng araw. Naghihiwalay lamang bago mananghalian. Kulang ang araw kung mawaglit sa kanila ang pagtatagpo.

"Minsan, isama mo naman ako sa daungan. Nakakasawa na ang plaza," ang hiling ni Clarita. At sa hapon ding iyon sila nagtungo sa ilog. Nakita ni Clarita ang lungtiang paligid, asul na langit at malinaw na tubig ng ilog. Doon siya umawit at nakinig ang lahat ng bahagi ng kalikasang naniniwala sa pag-ibig, pati at lalo pa ang gitarista. At sa daungan nila nakitang nagpaalam ang araw at bumati ang buwan. Nakaupo sila habang nakababad ang kanilang mga paang masaya sa banayad na daloy ng tubig sa ilog. Hinawakan ni Antonio ang kamay ni Clarita ngunit tumayo ito at tinitigan ang lalaki. Mahirap matanto ang nasa isip ng babae kung nakasalalay lamang sa mga salita ang pagpapahayag ng saloobin. Bahagyang nakadama ng takot si Antonio at inakalang nasaling niya ang babae. Subalit inilugay ng babae ang kaniyang buhok at naghubad sa harap ng musikero. Nakita ni Antonio sa liwanag ng buwan ang kariktan ng buong katawan ni Clarita. Tumayo siya at nagsimula ang duweto ng pakikipagtalik ng dalawang alagad ng sining. Nadama nila ang init ng isa't isa at kanilang pinagliyab ang daungan sa nagbabaga nilang katawan.

Doon nila natagpuan ang kaligayahang hatid ng pag-iibigan. Inaangkin nila ang isa't isa ngunit maingat sila lalo't walang alam ang magulang ni Clarita at pinagkakatiwalaan nito ang gitarista. Masaya ang dalawa at namuhay silang puno ng awit at sayaw. Ngunit may kaganapang magiging sanhi upang tumugot ang kanilang lubos na kasiyahan. Naranasan ngEspaña ang digmaang sibil. Malawakang taggutom at paghihirap ang naranasan ng marami sa ilalim ng mga Republikano. Marami ang namatay sa bintang ng maling pagkampi at gayon din sa gutom at sakit. Kinuha ang kalalakihan upang magsilbi sa militar para suportahan ang pamahalaan sa nag-aaklas na mga heneral. Kabilang si Antonio sa Nasyonalistang lumalaban sa pamahalaan. Pinili ni Clarita ang mamalagi sa munting pamamahay ng gitarista. Paraan din ito ng kaniyang pag-iingat upang malayo sa kaguluhan ng digmaan. Mas ligtas at tagô ito.

Mahirap ang buhay, lalo pa sa unang taon ng kanilang pagkakawalay. Napipi ang gitara at napilay ang mananayaw. Nawalan na ng balita ang babae ukol sa musikerong napasama sa militar laban sa Republikano. Nalaman na lamang ni Clarita ang pagpaslang sa kaniyang mga kaibigan at pamilya na labis niyang dinamdam. Nadama niya sa pag-iisa ang labis na kalungkutan at kawalang pag-asa. Naririnig niya ang lagaslas ng tubig at ang bawat nalalagas na dahon. Nangungulila at nag-aalala na rin siya para kay Antonio. Madalas niyang tipahin ang gitara kahit na walang nabubuong musika sa kaniyang mga kamay. Madalas niya itong tinitipa kaya't apat na kuwerdas na ang napapatid at nawala na sa tono ang natitira. Bunga ito ng desperasyon para makalikha ng musikang magpapaalala at magpapalapit sa kaniya kay Antonio. Nawala na ang dating tikas ng gitara ng maestro. At natatagpuan na lamang ni Clarita ang sariling yakap-yakap ito habang umiiyak.

Lumipas ang dalawang taon. Nakakatulugan na ni Clarita ang labis na hapis at ang gutom at uhaw. Nawala na rin sa tamang tunog ang kaniyang isipan. Napapatakbo siya sa tarangkahan nang ilang ulit matapos makarinig ng kaluskos o tinig na inaakala niyang kay Antonio. Nagigising siya mula sa isang malagim na panaginip kung saan niya nasaksihan ang pagpaslang sa kaniyang katipan. Sabog ang mukha nito at nangingisay sa hirap.

Sumapit ang ikatlong taon at patuloy pa rin ang digmaan. Umaalingawngaw pa rin ang putukan. Naaamoy niya ang pulbura. At lalo pang humihigpit ang kaniyang yakap sa gitarang patid na ang kinakalawang at marupok nitong kuwerdas. Nagtungo sa daungan ang mananayaw, naghubo't hubad ito at saka nagpalutang-lutang sa tubig. Naging malinis ang babae, at umahon siya at saka nagtungo sa kusina. Nakita niya ang punyal na ipinanlilinis ng mangingisda sa kaniyang huli. Matalim pa rin ito at kumikinang. Nakita niya ang sarili sa talim at saka niya pinutol ang mahabang buhok. Halos sagad sa anit ito. Sininop, hinati, at tinirintas para gawing kuwerdas ng gitara. Matiyaga niya itong inipit sa katawan at sanga ng gitara habang patuloy siya sa pagluha.

Sinubukan niya itong patunugin at nakalikha ito ng pinakamalinis na musikang umaabot pa sa kampo ng mga hukbong Republikano. Naglabasan ang militar at para bang nagtataka sa kanilang naririnig. Umihip ang hangin at dinala pa ito sa napakalayong pook kung saan nakadestino si Antonio. Alam niyang tinatawag na siya ng kaniyang gitara. Maagang lumulubog ang araw kung taglamig.

Hinanap ng apat na sundalong Republikano ang tunog at natagpuang nagmumula ito sa bahay malapit sa ilog. Kanilang binuksan ang tarangkahan. Muling narinig ni Clarita ang kaluskos sa tarangkahan kung kaya't napatakbo siya rito. Inakala niyang nagbalik na si Antonio. Walang saplot na tumambad ang babae sa harapan ng mga sundalo. At tila naging mga buwitre at lobo ang mga ito. Nakita nila ang babaeng wala sa tamang katinuan na maaaring pagsamantalahan. Nakadama si Clarita ng takot kung kaya't tumakbo itong pabalik at hinagilap ang punyal. Sumisigaw itong sumugod pabalik sa mga sundalo, subalit dalawang punglo ang sumalubong sa kaniyang sikmura. Nagparaos ang mga sundalo sa maligamgam na katawan ni Clarita at saka ito itinapon sa ilog upang anurin sa bayang magbibigay sa kaniya ng marangal na libing. Umalis ang mga sundalo na nagtatawanan na parang walang anumang nangyari.

Lumipas ang ilang buwan at humupa na ang digmaan. Natapos na rin ang paninilbihan ni Antonio at makababalik na siya sa kaniyang pamumuhay bilang mangingisda, gitarista at asawa ni Clarita. Baon niya ang pananabik sa babaeng kaniyang iniibig. Hangad niya ang magkaroon ng tahimik na pamumuhay kapiling ang kaniyang magiging mag-anak.

Narating niya ang kaniyang tahanan at nakita ang lahid ng dugo mula sa tarangkahan hanggang sa loob ng bahay. Nakita niya ang ilang patak patungo sa ilog kung saan niya natagpuan ang punyal. Nagpatiwakal o pinaslang, hindi niya alam kung ano ang sinapit ng kaniyang minamahal. Ito ang sumpa ng mga musa.

Madalas, lalo't ginintuan ang liwanag ng buwan at malamig ang simoy, pinatutunog ni Antonio ang gitarang may kuwerdas na buhok. Umaawit ito na tila tinig ni Clarita. Nakasandal ito sa kaniyang dibidib. Malayo ang nararating ng tunog. Marami ang nakaririnig subalit walang nakatatagpo. Ito ang musikang walang sinuman ang makagaya. At ngayon, ganap na maestro na ang dating payak na mangingisda.

May 2, 2011 Bulakan, Bulakan ValenzuelaCity

poetry

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When I Look Into Myself and Other Poems

Cirilo F. Bautista

When I Look Into Myself

If people were tourists in their own country they would be exotic, origin in dreams of long drives over valleys of wheat and corn or underground caves with coral cathedrals. They would have an idiom rich with references to kingdoms and royalties, religion and brontosaurus, not to kitchen plumbing to be repaired and the rally at the city hall. You go away and bring home only the skin Of your soul. Turn to anger if you want fame. The emphasis you carry shapes your thought and explodes the right words in the train station or shopping mall. At night you fashion names to go with your face. Eastern and hard-edgeanger's has two holes for eyes and a gash for lips. It hides behind a salutation to measure strength and distance and, for the grand perspective, behind love. Love conceals a mountain as easily as a coloring book, putting a sheen on the earth's surface so you can call it ocean, but its talk testifies only to the far side of neglect, oranges left to sour in the sun or an abandoned playground. Take away the aching heart, the creaking knee bones, the dwindling paycheck and you see love's skeleton. What holds it up is its knowledge that it is believed, that when you go from room to room searching for your glasses it will give them to you.

My mother smoked a cigarette with the lighted end inside her mouth. I would watch her as she sat on a stool doing the day's wash. She blew a constant stream of smoke from the left side of her lips, while her hands made soap suds billow and burst. In our village not known for unusual things, it was short of a miracle, the ember not dying in her mouth and her palate not getting burned. Style is the perfection of design, a habit of usage that strives after elegance,

by which a language is renewed to bridge desire and idiom, not to singe the text that pushes into the but to clarify the warm edges. Fine rhythm, no spittle adrift or, if a landscape, no embellishments to spoil the perspective. Nature rendered into a convincing craft makes tension bloom from puffs and billows as in a night song rain drips from branches over a lagoon. It's not survival that is the leit motif, but a solitude in working out a peace of mind or a pattern of units above the dense imagery, so that to suffer is to suffer wherever the place, to love always has an ending. What is forever but chance encounter with the sublime while the here and now, immersed in soapy water, is erasable, therefore improvable. Mother did not have to choose. To be where one suffers is to suffer everywhere, so to get somewhere you must construct a fable of pain to soothe the ache.

Mother would spit the cigarette on the grass and start a new one. The art is in getting used to it, its essentials and fringes, its common moves toward meaning that unclutters the mind, fire's danger considered. When the breathing normalized there might be a tune in her head on a frenzy in her hands, every squeeze on clothes a validation of her history, the ragtag ghost army of it, the soap that stings the eyes and washes away the tears of cold neglect. Style is not about freedom. You have to make your soul work, there is no other way. Being accountable is approaching the guard and spreading before him the contents of your bag, "These are all I have." What the guard thinks is of no consequence. You take your life in your own hand, nobody moves you to do it but you do it. Nothing is calculable at this point. The porter may just be taking his cigarette out of his pocket or giving a coded signal, the customs inspector may be scratching his arm or writing numbers on his skin. In a larger context it may be at a government office or a sports event—your possession identifies you suspicion counts like a snake but you wait, for lover's reprimand, a master's praise, a crow about to perch on a wooden fence. Waiting is of no consequence, too, it will not alter the outcome of the act. In the South the railroad tracks pierce the horizon to reach the postal boxes with the message, "I am gone," punctuate it with a cargo of lotus seeds that nobody will eat. Honor is another thing. Between the guard and your bag, honor will fly the distance to the barbed wire fence, huffing and puffing and saying nothing. The mountain and river will run past it like clockwork and it will not be caught. Nothing wrong with your bag, it turns out. Five years in isolation

and there's nothing wrong with that. Democracy creeps sidewise, one eye closed, your property a tattered diary and a piece of soap shaped like a duck. What good is remembering? You throw the diary outside the window as the taxi enters a dusty road. The duck can amuse you later when the pain allows your jaw to chew properly so much did they hit it in the room. For now you won't smoke but in sad silence muse on how in the jungle that you have left your friends plan the world's order or on how in the house you are headed for chirping birds will remind you of your truncated heroism and how history makes fools of us all.

Still asleep at noon, my guardian angel curls up In the sofa by the window which the sunlight Pushes with colored fingers. It touches his face's Dark skin, feels the cracks and scales surrounding his nose: that is how I know he has been away last night, the quick heaving of his chest, the cobwebs entangled on his wings. How much did he bear this time among the pirates of Somalia and the bakers of Syria, bled, did he, with sorrow for Egyptian children thrown in labor camps, their years gone sour on the tree of life, oh how he must have grown older than two hundred years, and when he was captured and tied and placed before the firing squad, did he regret the disguise he took a missionary priest—or he just cannot play at anything untrue? But he fell gallantly and later, when no one was looking, picked himself up and flew to this room. Swoosh, swoosh, just like that, over Tripoli and Stalingrad and Manila with no coffee or a change of shirts—I know, he tells me things about human faithlessness and secret medicine, about defining the very soul of evil in evil's own terms and blowing up the global sadness into fiery pieces of glass. He groans as he turns on his side, adjusting his feathers to the new position. What does his program include tomorrow—

a bridge to build in Sudan, a farm road in Brazil, a church in China? From pain to purity so many bodies to caress, he quick but not quick enough for a large sanctification, and no speech dead center through tropical storms, battered and mumbled in the wind. Still he must nourish his heart and hold his anger that would dislodge the Pacific water and turn Asia upside-down, invent somehow a language heaven would understand when he argues his mysticism ... A smile crosses his lips—financial logistics, Medals, commendation letters, medicines, Urinals, prefabricated houses, And all the armies that can be squeezed into nine ships—Oh, the ambition, the fear and trembling, and I am sick and aged and alone, wanting grace in darkness, and muscles for my bones.

Age indicates a grand design, an agitation in the earth's crust or the invention of metal. It is not growing into some expectation to measure progress in the crop of rice or the fattening cows. In the wood language, what ages make the distance between chainsaw and log, between table and lumber? An imagined smoothness in the armrest well-sanded and sealed, natural color stands out blinking in the light. As when in Age of Flowers a man climbs the vines to kiss his lady nestled with the swallows. The moon glides by to the give his face a glow. There is a whisper in the trees. If a siege takes the castles, if fifty horses run out of the burnt gate into the wilderness, if the lady escapes with the man, it is an age well-lived. In the Age of Salt the butcher shops cannot get salt from the sea. Fish jump dead to the water's surface and meat spoils on the spit for lack of flavoring. What to feed the soldiers camping in the forest? This is probably when the Deluge comes to regurgitate the bottom shoals and start a new biology. The Age of Barter is the beginning of wisdom, that one can add or subtract any number of times and still come out a winner. The equation explains the death of lovers and the rise of the stock exchange no matter how other factors of life may be playing in the field. We trade for best value

and end up with an empty house-the furniture and the room wanting to hide forever. We barter a tyrant for a hero, a hero for a democrat, a democrat for a fish vendor, a fish vendor for a barber. Or we barter for equal power, aiming for plenitude, a monument for a bust, or any self-image that can be polished. The Age of Innocence comes briefly in between protracted wars and famines. People retreat to caves and higher grounds where they raise animals and shape the beginning of new beliefs. In the end, they regain a purity of thought and a fascination for living. They have songs and poems to celebrate the night. Not so with the age of Metal when tar blackness pushes the sunlight farther into the coast, no music lifts the nation to surging joy, but the din of clashing steel tears the sky and the sleeping sea. Wrapped around the body or stamped with a ruling face, metal shoves winners and losers into common graves, their cry haunting the battlefield, "Bring us home!' "Bring us home!" To rise again they will have to have the directions and guidance of a sheep.

Ancient Love and Other Poems

Rita B. Gadi

Ancient Love

Suddenly it is very late. Time hangs over the spirit at bay; the winds assail the ageing waters that fade out to the sea in waves of shadows, retreats of silence into the unknown world as deep as certain nights which wake the sleep from nocturnal death.

Light bends the secret words consumed there once uncertain, quite unknown; now leaning into the April road an early wishing for the rain perches on the mind about to fall.

Seek out, closed memory, an ancient love alone in the alley of swaying ghosts, in the late hour it searches rest. It must return home to the heart that has charted every star and corner of the earth to the last fleck of dust.

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I am performing a map of enormous madness as open as sky sees space in measured vastness without distances outward-gazed within a course of stars where sailors chart their journeys of waves and tides and shores for ever ebbing as the approach recedes behind the calm of lonely docks seeking dry-land after a weary voyage engaged in fog and steam and simple songs from simple folk who navigate the winds with simple signs like these I have here in my arms spread wildly wafting words I cannot speak sounds I cannot make to say I am the story of the world with all its mountains with all its seas with all its birds and flowers I am the cloud of the future fire and I am the dance of a sun-lit day aflame among the ruins of a stoney shrine where pilgrims pray to save their souls from the poison of the seeds they eat as they feast on the follies of the holy who shine like the heat in summer salt on their skins sun in their eyes and burning flesh as I assault a meaning in the silence I am sealed before the simulating similes spectators speak in the gestures of my hands now filled with dreams dissolved in magic mirrored movements of each life I live out of the mouths who make

the sign of the cross across their breasts invoking saints and angels to fumigate the spirits we oftentimes invite without expecting that their presence comes with the air we breathe though the rains wash the roofs of dirt and other waste that do not fall from the sky together with the dirt and other waste that comes from below our feet or by our beds or in the corner store where we meet the very old and the very young the pets and the police and the passers-by who ask directions or who ask the names of those who have gone to another street which does not have a corner store that gives instructions to those who have lost their way or lost some other thing we cannot find never will perhaps because it is the season to be mute with dumb gesticulations of this soundless game we have allowed to alleviate the sadness from the madness of this faceless laugh that entertains the energies I emote to show the fragments of a syllable sounding like another something not in any way resembling what I really have in mind at the tip of the finger like the tip of a tongue twirling thoughts like pieces of a picture puzzle half of which was left somewhere or forgotten in a box of what we call

the odds and ends that gather mold and dust and memories the way old clothes remember passion after passion the anonymous bodies they enclose with the scent of the original sweat beside a lover who may have pledged a timeless love and seasons of belonging while the moon lay like an orange in the sea and a single bird cried out in the darkness piercing the silence as it rested somewhere in the nameless night holding its breath over the shadows of the foaming waves as I shape a slice of air and carve a mouth that it may speak like water flowing from a mind at play inventing figures it has found along the way to be the image of a noun or verb a sculpted form that fashions joy or grief advancing or retreating or pretending there are rules that guide this make-believe to be the fantasies I mirror when I stare at all the eyes that look surprised how stories un-recited tell a tale without the letters being read a music without notes is sung oh melody you blush inside the tune ecstatic feeling out the writing in the air who begs for understanding weary with the weight of time I do not dare dispose of and trembling hesitate to end what never started from a beginning after all.

You have no measure and each day gleams with your new face. You are the first in my memory: slender as the youth on the track is aimed at the wind before the run, searing as the heat in summer changes the color of the skin, and from your depths is written the story of a hunter's strength in the wilderness of his predators. You are the velocity of light scathing the secrets in men's minds, exposing them to be weighed against the price of greed in a world devoured by avarice or ambition's rage. You have no equal in the conduct of truth and honor; un-stained by the infernal menace that lines the pockets of power and its surrogates. Of you there is the spirit of fire in its original purity, burning every fiber of the flesh to be the finest warrior worthy to be named the son of a god. You are the blood of celestial origins and the sound of your voice translates the language of eternity for the understanding of mortal ears. There is no heart you cannot touch enough with the message of your name, and the mineral of gold is your soul.

"When you tell your story on a *B'laan* mat, you speak what is true, what is authentic ... we believe that the good spirits would then commune with the human beings; but one must keep faith, or it will not work ...

... and the hand-woven mat spread on the floor becomes a sacred place where disputes and conflicts can be resolved ..."

The weaving begins with the colors and textures of their lives: forests, cornfields, the celebrations for births, betrothals, bountiful harvests, and all the movements the heavens bless between every dawn and day-end including the silence of the nights when their dreams continue to complete the tapestry that will be spread before or after a sorrow, a grief, or a strife, as the sacred ground and spirit-sanctuary on which all conflicts are to be resolved by the presence of ancestral wisdom and the rituals of incantations communing with those who are gathered in the present for lessons of the mat now summoned from every woven strand handed down to the women who alone are worthy to weave the stories of their tribe into the creations of their hands, until, one terrible day, the whole village was burned by an untellable war and there was no structure left to mark the territory of their hallowed past except the chapel of an alien church that taught them the commandment to love one another as a god loves them while their wailings wafted the sadness that spilled from their wounds,

to their hearts, to their mats as tributes to the truth that is written in their souls for the healing of their tears because the pain needs to be assuaged for as long as it takes to finish the weaving of their lamentations into the livid images and intimate portraits of the *B'laans'* insurmountable strength in the telling of their world as beautifully as they are.

Cassandra

(May 20, 1997)

The first of my flesh fathered by the infancy of love speaks without words a dialect audibly distanced from any language known except by the years she gathered sounds as strange as the mystery of her mind exploring every element in a world for ever un-defined within her soul.

Child of questions, child un-shaped, child of nature's playful tricks, a gift as rarely given as designed perpetually preserved in bliss and bathed in awe, afloat, un-harmed amidst the ripples that recede the innocence of youth. She comes to me as though a decade had not passed between us her fingers crawling on my skin they seem to chart what breathes beneath what throbs with warmth inside the surface that she presses marking me to memory.

Her age is the beginning of the earth: immeasurable space spilling out of her eyes as they pierce all things un-created in her primeval thought, the vastness of her world instinct alone instructs contains no faculty for fear.

On the Eve and Other Poems

Dennis Haskell

On the Eve

(Wed 18 May 2011)

My dearest darling Rhond,

I write this to you, or me, or to space on the eve of yet another operation, but I need to write for the horrors and anxieties – probably paranoia – that overtake me in the long, dead, dark reaches of the night – hours when every element of imagination is an ogre. I imagine having to ring our boys, your father, your sister, my mum, everyone, to say the operation has gone horribly wrong. I imagine the surgeon, someone with him to provide support – support him, not me – while he slowly and painfully tells me the hardest part of his job is not slicing apart flesh – your flesh – or reaching and tearing out organs – he can do that – but this impossible sitting down to say unaccountably something went wrong, the risk was small, but he did tell us there was a .5% chance of dying on the table. Unaccountably... he is still wearing his gloves and gown, half-human – he will go away to be haunted by this forever, but not as much as me, as us.

Then a moment of sense jumps up and says this is ridiculous! But immediately I am back in an alternative horror – you've lost too much blood, the anaesthetist has misjudged the dose, the cancer cells are everywhere like children in a playground, your body couldn't take it. It's five years of this battling disease, rising and sinking in opposition to its strength or temporary weakness, building and building – a tsunami that pushes aside or surges over the flimsy dykes of reason, and again I am, we are, swimming, floundering, drowning in a hysteria of worry so unlike the impassive, unthinking march of cancer and all the science the surgeon gets to fight it. Tomorrow he will do the job, and both our lives hinge on the steadiness of his hands, and his impersonal skill. It is no match for our emotions. One day, we know, we will lose this battle – the body and all its absurdities always wins. Until then we struggle and fight and sinfully almost pray.

Renewal

Your driver's licence renewal notice arrives in the post innocently enough - after all, it's just a notice, part of the trivial, pay-attention-to-this, administrative detail of our lives.

You must choose: one more year or five. "Just one" you say, playing the Scotsman's daughter, "I wouldn't want to waste the money"

and something funny folds up inside me and keeps trembling its papery breath. "Our floating life is like a dream ..." In 1775 Shen Fu, about Yün, their lives already entwined: "I asked for the manuscripts of her poems and found that they consisted mainly of couplets and three or four lines, being unfinished ... I wrote playfully on the label of this book ... and did not realise that in this case lay the cause of her short life." Beginning *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*.

Tianjin, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing ladies and men by tens of thousands on tens of thousands of bicycles, mopeds, motorscooters, motorbikes, gauze their faces, handkerchief their mouths, so many particles of dust and lead pixel the air. The clouds ache, then mud and uncertainty pour onto streets while the wind swings its shrill seizures all around my windows, nature's opera makes an immediate audience of millions.

And pausing over Shen Fu and Yün, their lives afloat, I think of our single lives, of last year, when death almost swept you away. In Hangzhou, Ferrari, Versace, Luis Vuitton arc the magnificent West Lake, obelisks of apartments arrow the ground like headstones for the living. As far as anyone's eye can see the small, ancient villages are being swept into the prim nostalgia of history. Now stinky tofu in the streets, Starbucks, azaleas in flower, a traffic soldier's shrill whistle – ignored – the rush of feet fills the street, and the next street, and the next, and the ... Dodging battalions of legs, on pedals, flat to floors,. coming from a three-quarters empty country the faces come toward me, staring straight ahead, too many to think the "What if?" of other possibilities. I find it hard to believe in

individuality, that each gaze has in mind fears, whispers, expectations; Chinese count in numbers so enormous they add up to anonymity. No matter how many faces you see there are always more, no matter how many arms and hands you touch there are always more, no matter how many motorbikes and voices you hear there are always more ...

And beginning here without you my love, surrounded, drenched in this dense, teeming life, I feel as if the world itself were short of breath, floating, and all China a stretch of long silence.

Central

Rain sticks to the smooth-faced window as silk clothes mesh with saturated flesh. In the mornings I walk steeply, shin splints aching, feet flapping, baffled head angled to my feet: had Newton been born in Hong Kong gravity would have had no need of apples. The lemurs and baboons screech from their high wire trapezium cages. All about the green and soggy island lit-up windows stare, unblinking but inconstant like hints in punched card concrete code where life is lived vertically up and down mountainfaces that seem to say to our hurtling sleeves What are you doing here, what consequence? Government towers, shopping towers, escalators of possessions soak up the fast-paced, still air. The Hong Kong Art Museum displays the Seven Disciples of Tian Feng almost for free but you must really pay to see Luis Vuitton. A world of difference lies between Magazine Gap Road and Tsim Sha Tsui, between St John's Cathedral and the IFC. What is central to others, to me, as ferries creak across a soupy harbour?

Breakpoint and Other Poems

Isabella Banzon

Breakpoint

Red on your lips a little blush on your cheeks. Close your eyes Where's Daddy Did you see Daddy Mommy's at the other house How about the blue what goes with blue I feel like a clown I'm like in a circus I don't want to look like a clown Close your eyes I'll make you nice Where's Daddy gone Just you stay still *How much is five minutes* ľm not done Mommy wants us out of a house I'm trying to fix something here We're going to get it from Mommy You look I look pretty like a girl who hasn't slept in five years I can't move my face It's just paint. Mommy's back from the other house Mommy's taking us to the other house Where's Daddy's upstairs Is Daddy awake How much is five minutes Let's wake Daddy Close your eyes.

Six Sorry Questions

Did I come on too strong like I spelt your doom? I'm sorry, but you got it wrong.

There's a new girl, in a sarong, in your wipeout-white room. Did I come on too strong?

Don't give me that sweep of a long line, love sudden, abloom, again. I'm sorry but you got it wrong.

Oh to hold the moment yet prolong the sore need to consume... Did I come on too strong?

Youth's a spent song. Let's not resume the 'I'm sorry but you got it wrong'.

Now you belong to the already-chosen. Why fume? Did I come on too strong? I'm sorry? But you got it wrong.

Quotes on a 64th Birthday

A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit, a violinwhat else does a man need to be happy? Books have led some to learning, others to madness. We laugh because we are full of self -doubt, full of vague feelings of inferiority, full of a desperate need to be assured. Now we remember the futures that were, that the only true wisdom is knowing you know nothing, yet nothing is to be feared, it is only to be understood. What else does a man need to be happy? Golf? Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.

Consuelo

Like you said, I'm a whore to want you (on streets, among maps and metrorail tickets, along fountains, ruins, cul-de-sacs, at museums, the opera, gelato and tea, by the entrance or exit, weeping, again, you) weeping inside me.

Survivor Guilt

after Alicia Suskin Ostriker

But it's really guilt you want to talk about and cannot find the words so you punish yourself

you call yourself perpetrator you text past 9 p.m. thinking *criminal liable,* unable to ring *unable to ring*

meting out a self-imposed death sentence your crime poetry, books, sport—perhaps

but always you've been busy, always afterwards sincerely apologetic *this is treachery, they say,*

to have survived death, to go on living in a house built out of love for the dying, the dead, memory

now still life, the photo collage on the wall your children, your wife and you candid, happy over the years—

you try hard to make amends you've clutter thrown out, the brickwork repaired, patio chairs

rearranged for that perfect view of the stars, after pizza and an old movie about the guises of love, of grief.

Psalm of the Aperture and Other Poems

Eugene Gloria

Psalm of the Aperture

Today I decided to be naked so my wife handed me her floral apron for modesty. We strolled

to the business section where we found an eating spot overlooking the river.

Our waitress was ignoring our table. But my wife had grown fond of our spot and didn't want to leave.

The muteness of the river was intoxicating. And my wife's attention, radiant!

We sat there gazing at the river for nearly an hour. The camera on my lap like Emerson's

transparent eyeball. I love the pleasing noise it makes. A satisfied burp, a sated account of the apparatus' secret joy: capturing the light on my wife's face at noon, or at dusk.

On our long walk home, my wife began telling me a story about a 67-year-old woman

giving birth to twins. I hear bird chatter, the river nearby. I lean this doughy

mass of me on her voice as if it were a body that has lived a long time.

What has become of Raymundo and the herd under his watch? And what of the sky, a dirty white coat of Raymundo? Such was the world when I arrived. I was tired from the staggering hike and I had a book to crack open for the first time. Just when the pages were melting and my eyelids began to sag, I was startled by a commotion. The bleat of sheep, the faint, and hoarse bark of Raymundo. No, it couldn't have been Raymundo. It was the murmur of humans from a distance, which sounds almost like the strained voice of Raymundo. Exhaustion won over curiosity and down I went into the white peony petals of sleep. I recall now the dream I had of a Battle Royale with Pepper Gomez and Tik Tik Afoa and Ray Stevens assuming the villainous role with his beach-blond hair and blue trunks. The blue of his trunks like a gesture of conciliation, was meant to be friendly to the eyes. In my dream I floated like the lovers in a Marc Chagall painting, soaring over a ring of wrestlers body-slamming one another in the center and along the corners. My bird's eye view allowed a clear shot of men in their sturdy high-waist trunks, busy in their office cubicles, working two by two. Does the last man standing determine the winner? Then I woke and remembered Raymundo, the dog manqué in the middle of the fenced-in field. The sheep in the center and along the corners making their baah baah baahing cries and Raymundo ever watchful, eyeing me like the air marshals of Homeland Security. Then that morning, all the talk was about the breakout. The sheep had rushed the fence and escaped. They trampled the vegetable garden though eventually were rounded up by elite sheep-herding dogs deployed by the owner. I asked how Raymundo fared during the jailbreak and the reports were unfavorable. He just stood there helpless, according to eyewitnesses, while the sheep bolted and scattered. Heaven knows there is still room for working stiffs like Raymundo. Elysian fields like a peculiar horn of plenty with muddy clouds and an entire tribe of Raymundo heralding the new day like a tone-deaf priest trying to sing with the choir.

Bra

The balconette, the backless, the demi-cup, plunge, posture: a list of surrounding noise forming into a Jell-O of semantic memory. Racerback, sheer, soft cup, strapless, underwire, the core as in my cerebral cortex has an eye and hook fastener begging to unsnap. My ambulant cabbage has built-in stretch memory even though my heart, poor heart needs winding up at daybreak. My father is at his wick's end. His mind's a mess, a splatter of church rice. When he lost my mother, his brain went flabby from watching too much TV. To the heart of things human there is the plunge, the posture, sheer underwire of grace. There is the bra drying on a hanger. My father forgetting where my mother went.

Geronimo

If the night wind could speak in sentences, it would say, "I got a face on you, G." Because the night wind knows the body always dies before its name. Because Geronimo is an itinerant velocity with in-laws stooped in labor camps, women marrying men with surnames like Jobim and Yonemoto. Brasiliero fishermen know that Geronimo is a call to arms, a leap, a rush to judgment. And wherewith Geronimo comes a day late and a dollar short if Geronimo comes at all. Geronimo snug around the belt and collar, riding shotgun in a pickup, trolling for day laborers at parking lots of Home Depot.

February 4, 1899 and Other Poems

Remé Grefalda

February 4, 1899

i.

What were our brown souls saying against the timbre of their foreign voice? While being hacked to pieces to their deaths, What were the hymns that Willie's friends intoned?

Ours were aghast at their betrayal: *twenty million* -- the going dollar rate! A treaty echoed while headlines blared: American Benevolence Now Reigns!

Stay down (Benevolent Men insist), stay down! We need your corpses (not freemen) to serve as stepping plates!

"Hurry! Before the darkness combs the hills! Before the mountains waken! "We'll wipe their barren culture out! "Then seal our graven claim!"

ii.

Now see the self-crowned heroes pose (before the grinding reels), While battle-weary boys unpack the plundered souvenirs.

"*Christ,* were they little, were they brown! Some were Sambo-black! "We burned them out of bushes, and most could not fight back!"

"Go! Dig 'em shallow! Dig 'em deep! "And if you please, just dump the heap! Now, hurry, lads! "Strike down your spades upon this curséd blackened turf!"

iii.

Where are our somber rites? Where are the sticks to mark our hallowed bones? Not even graves, but trenches stacked with nameless "bandit-drones"

Our weeping widows stream and search beyond the fading light. They tarry, pass . . . they linger where beneath the dirt we mutely cry. The fate of all forgotten bones—drudged in forgotten battles,

Shhhhhh!

Who brought them here? We brought them here . . . Old bones and ancestry survive.

Three million immigrant-strong we stand abreast Their hopes are silt now slaked upon our souls —we are their filial home.

For justly here they can—those dead brown souls—bestir their final quest: To fan their ashen history; to chant and search and roam—

Here to meet their resurrection among their very own.

Jitneytropolis

Iscariot struts his stuff here. Not with you, Sin Jin. Nor there, Sao Paolo.

Ay Santissima! is not a saint caressed But a spewed invective by a fawning lola Riding out mean streets.

Get used to it! Here jaywalkers reign supreme! Here blips and honks converse in tune with revving engines.

Crazy Merkana, stay home … Don't give away your balikbayan status By a quest for dirty ice cream!

I lost my stateside flip-flops boarding a Blumentritt racer, saw them float away: Noah's pair escaping the ark.

What's fare, what's pocket change? Seat's wet, dare I—

"GodknowsHudasnotpay."

1.

Like a ghost familiar in its haunts, I move about in wistful ways on board yet another train remembering how foolishly certain we were (as we roamed the aisles) that a seat would plug us and a laptop for a nine-hour segment of this ride, the many train rides

during one summer that didn't swelter as it did in previous ones because I wasn't where I used to be.

I was there. With you. Riding trains. Cutting through flatlands and marshes, time and endless tunnels, Climbing upwards and across the map of all good things:

Here in the Center of the Americas passing backwoods and littered yards. Then rising, awed at twilight beneath the quiet fall of evening snow in June. I travel now through Autumn woods, wistful here without you . . . but I was lonelier then than I am now, remembering how I pushed myself towards the viewing car, while you slept unaware that I left your side to let my eyes meander on the moving pin-lit darkness, sorting through questions

for answers that arrive today . . .

3.

There is no distance. Not for us. Nor a swathe of unaccounted time. There is a Kindness hovering And insisting that we Simply Be. There is a fullness that we toyed with so that every sound and jolt of this solo ride echo days that used to be, "Last call" reminders of the mischief we exchanged. And oh, the missing warmth in every tuck warding away the cold oblivious then of all that would unfold.

All that Has . . . Here in the Afterwards . . . 4.

So why was it that I tried so hard to never make my anguish known? When all I ever wanted was to say, before that train returned us to our separate ways:

that we might love, only that we might love.

Ikatlong Mata

Allan Popa

Ikatlong Mata

Habang ipinaliliwanag ng giya ang mekanismo ng Naglalahong Baril,

ang isa naming kasama tila may ibang nakikita sa kahuyan. Ayon sa kanya,

may nagkukubli sa likod ng mga dahon na hanay ng mga sundalong

hindi alam na matagal nang natapos ang digmaan. Sinundan namin

ang kaniyang tingin. Wala kaming nakita. Sadyang mahusay silang magtago.

Ngunit hindi rin daw nila kami nakikita. Naglalaho marahil ang mundo

kung nakatutok lamang ang pansin sa kalaban na inaabangan ngunit hindi kailanman

dumating. O dumating nang hindi namalayan. Hindi siya kumibo nang tanungin ko

kung saan matatagpuan ang ikatlong mata. Lumagos sa akin ang kaniyang tingin. Sa kaniyang mga pelikula laging may tumitingala

Laging nasa likod ng kortina ang pinagmumulan ng liwanag

Laging may tabing: mga dahon, ulap

Na tila sinasabi

Huwag mo itong titigan kung ayaw mong masilaw, mabulag

Kung hindi ito basag-basag na kislap na mapagmamasdan sa ibabaw ng dumadaloy na tubig

Huwag

Nasa likod ng rolyo ng pelikula ang pinagmumulan ng liwanag upang makita

> ang pelikula ang liwanag

Sabi ni Stein walang hangin dito.

Sabi ni De Kooning walang pintuan.

Ngunit anong lawak ng mapahihingahan sa makitid na kuwadro.

Kung manikip man ang dibdib o tila maubusan ng hininga sa pagtunghay

walang ibang sumasakal kundi ang sariling damdamin.

Isla Kapung-Awan

Sa Isla Kapung-awan, tuyo na ang mga balon. Malaon nang hindi umuulan. Tigang na ang mga taniman. Upang makainom, kailangan nilang umiyak. Pumipikit sila at iniisip na lumisan sila sa Isla Kapung-awan. Nagpakalayo-layo. Tila may malalim na balon sa kanilang kalooban na hindi natutuyo. Ngunit pagdilat nila, wala silang natatanaw kundi ang lawak ng dagat. Walang kabila. Kailangan nilang lumuha upang walang mauhaw.

Ang Kamatayan ni Bella Flores

(alinsunod kay Michael Fried)

Ngayong pagtatakipsilim, katulad ng mga nagdaang huling mga araw ng tag-init, naglalabasan mula sa mga bitak at guwang sa kasuluk-sulukan ng bahay ang hindi mabilang na gamugamo. Walang nakaaalam sa dahilan ng kanilang pagmamadali. Binubulabog at pinalalabog nila ang mga ilaw, paikot-ikot, tila hibang sa daloy ng liwanag. Nauubos ang ating pasensiya, tila hindi sila nauubos. Nararamdaman natin ang kanilang mumunting paa, nanunulay sa kiliti, nanunuot sa mga butas ng katawan, nasusumpungan sa kanin at sabaw. Napipilitan tayong isara ang ilaw. Wala silang naiiwang bakas sa muling pagliwanag kundi ang kanilang mga pakpak. Tila bigat na kinailangang malagas, kay hirap walisin dahil sa kagaanan. Saan nga ba sila tumutungo? Kailangan ng rahan, kailangan ng sapat na layo, upang matipon sa mga palad ang mumunting kariktan na alay nila sa mundong ibabaw.

creative nonfiction

Analogue Souls

Doy Petralba

Track 1 Intro: Emperor Control Remote in D major Rallentando

She's coming back they say, coming back in a way. I only wish she'd return for good. Maybe that's just wishful thinking but I'm talking about turntables and records, not my sister. In this age of 0's and 1's, everyone seems to be down with the fast and the crispy, down with crispy clear movies and music in kilobytes per second. The days of hand-written letters, snail-mail postage stamps and manual cameras are being forgotten. Buttons have taken over the world. Emperor Control Remote bids thee *click*, *click*, *and be on your way loyal subject*. I guess there's nothing wrong with all the ruckus about progress and speed, nothing wrong with moving forward and saving time.

Except I like wasting time. I like wasting time turning the pencil sharpener's lever before writing. I enjoy soaking envelope corners in warm water, waiting for stamps to inch away. After the last shot, I take pride in rewinding the rolling crank of my camera. These rituals and ceremonies, far from being ignored, are savored. Because when I do away with them, something profound is changed, perhaps nothing truly lost but everything significantly altered.

Track 2 A/V

If I ever have to choose between being deaf or being blind, I wouldn't think twice. The horror of being cut off from the buzz and the hush, the sighs and the moans—that is exile terrible and true.

But I should like to start and talk about my journeys in sound by invoking a memory of its complete and utter absence.

We were driving home from the hospital. I was sitting in the back of our sedan. I was three years old. I had just been roused from a deep, refreshing slumber. My eyes were bright and wide. I remember the vast, empty road lined with majestic acacia trees, leaves swaying slowly with the breeze. We rode past swathes of wild grass standing still against the horizon, immovable and blue. And everything, every little thing was bathed in the mellow light of morning. All of it seemed to exude a tinge of gold. The steering wheel. The dashboard. And my new born sister, wrapped in layers of white cotton blankets, nestled in our mother's bosom. I gazed at her head while she snoozed, still oblivious to our bond. I will never forget that soft cotton blanket cuddling her; never forget that renegade thread floating by her shoulder, shimmering in the wind as if it was made of pure light.

I try to recall that particular scene nowadays and I find it bereft of any sort of auditory component. A silent film. But the light, always the light, beaming streaks of gold in the landscape of memory—the serenity and radiance I never heard inside our little red sedan.

Track 3 Subs and Dubs

Then came the noise.

And crushes and coolness and *Aquanet* and puffy glam-rock hair and screaming at your sister and *Betamax* and puffy glam-rock hair and *Ninja Kids* and school fights and *Trapper-Keepers* and avoiding your parents and glam-rock hair and cassette tapes and . . . have I mentioned puffy glam-rock hair yet?

I grew up in the eighties when cassettes had reached their apex. During the holiday season, I'd listen to Christmas songs and transcribe the lyrics word for word so I could sing along. When I heard *The Twelve Days of* *Christmas* for the first time, I almost died (years later, *American Pie* would have the same effect). Then I discovered the features of the multiplex. A system which allowed the music and vocal tracks to be separated. All I had to do was pan left, and only the music would be heard. When I panned right, the melody faded, leaving a solitary voice for me to decipher all the way up to the twelfth day.

But how was this happening? Wasn't music recorded in one go, all in one track?

Soon I discovered that the cassette tape was a smaller version of the reel-to-reel tape. An offspring that basically employed the same principle of capturing sound waves from a microphone and making it stick to the tape by using electro-magnetic technology. The tape could either have two monaural audio tracks or two stereo pairs (actually making it a four track tape). This feature allowed different tracks (music and voice in this case) to be recorded on separate channels (left and right speakers).

During my exploits in lo-fi, I chanced upon a wonderful device in my cousin's house: the four-track recorder. Unlike a standard cassette player, which erases the entire track when you press *record*, this device allows four independent tracks to be recorded separately. The tape-head on a standard player could only playback and erase in mono, while the four-track tape-head could access all the tracks in the tape. Now I could sing *The Twelve Days of Christmas* in baritone on track one, alto on track two, bass on three and tenor on four (talk about vanity).

But what better way to pay homage to the eighties than to reminisce about the mix tape. Ah the mix-tape! The true symbol of one's undying love, the quintessential love letter rendered in a language that is music. You didn't need to be so explicit about the mushy stuff. In fact, you didn't even have to say a word. The message could be camouflaged. The trick involved a careful selection of songs that shaped the over-all "theme" of the album. If the tape was for an anniversary, it would include songs about forever and ever and all that, songs like *Eternal Flame*. If the goal was to impress someone, as in the early stages of courtship, then the mix should include the songs du jour. This would create an image of a "cool" and sophisticated admirer (blehh).

Once, a friend asked me to cut a mix for his metal-head girlfriend who hated my guts. He wasn't into music, so I obliged and included every song I knew that supposedly contained satanic psalms heard in reverse play. Within a month they broke up. The metal-head discovered god when she entered high-school and my friend turned out to be Satan, the Lord of Headbangers himself. It was an Enervon milestone moment for our insignificant trinity.

But it doesn't matter when you were born. Everybody goes through the age of subs and dubs. The age when minds are like blank tapes, extremely impressionistic and vulnerable to the noise and violence of fads and trends, cassettes continuously dubbed and overdubbed. Tastes are defined and redefined, always changing, and never really satisfied with the final cut. The phase that could only record and read a world in mono.

Track 4 Conversions in F sharp

Affrettando

1 CuteMouse v1 Installed at	.9.1 alpha 1 PS/2 port	[FreeDOS]		
	drive C is W crial Number i of <u>C:></u>		GA0	
FDOS AUTOEXEC BOOTSECT COMMAND CONFIG DIGITAL	<dir> BAT 435 BIN5 12 COM 93,96 SYS 801 EXE 56</dir>	08-17-98 09-01-98 09-13-98 309-13-98 09-26-98 03-15-99	3:15p 3:16p 3:17p 3:18p 3:18p 3:18p 3:18p	
	6 file(s) 1 dir (s)	98,767 bytes 1,064,517,63		free

C:>fastopen c: digital.exe/x C:> _ Digital Conversion (Audio) I. Analog-to-digital[1](ADC) and digital-toanalog[2](DAC) converter Device 1: initiate... converting analog sound waves to discrete binary digit sequence Fidelity: 99.999% Device 2: initiate... converting binary codes to analog sound waves amplification level: maximum Generation loss: 0%

0

Subject: Greeting from the land of the free!From:Simon Saga <sagaworks@yahoo.com>To:"Doybag" <<u>sinigangcartel@yahoo.com</u>>Date:December 12, 2003

baldo maro the waldoferus! kamusta bai! maayo ka ba dong? na unsa ka naman diha? haha. well, i'm finally here. sayang wala ka nung despedida bai i'm sure you've heard of the parents literally dragging me out of the room for the flight. didn't pack a thing. hoped the plane would leave me. but the parents packed my stuff, the whole room bai! schemers. haha. weniweys, first christmas abroad. think i'll have me one of those winter depression type-o-suicides. kill my folks with guilt. haha. I'm living with an aunt somewhere in new york. time to get a job, a pad, build character. haha. lots of cousins here for support tho. faaaaaak! should've ditched that nursing exam like you said.

first chance I get, i am outta here.

sagaworks

11011 II. Word Size

```
Converting analog sound wave/word size
as binary digits(bit)
Initiate...
Bit rate set to maximum
frequency response (achievable noise level)/
fidelity proportion: 1:1
Possible values: 16, 24 bit
```

00100

Subject: sup meyng

- From: Simon Saga <sagaworks@yahoo.com>
- To: "Doybag" <sinigangcartel@yahoo.com>
- Date: April 20, 2004

sorry for the lag, been keeping myself busy, just moved back to ny after living in the west coast for a couple of months. plan on moving back there again. meeting all sorts of people. Gentle and mad. making weird connections and just finding more about myself and what i want. i'm apparently a veeery slow life learner. and it takes a while for stuff to sink in. this place is something else tho. every thing's so fast and everyone's so tekky. but that's progress for you, right? been catching up on books. lost track of movies. trying to learn flash programming. what's going on with you?

SS

101110

III. Sampling Rate.readme

Defined as sample rate per second of analog sound wave/ Sample rate increase is directly proportional to fidelity/ Possible values: 44.1,48,88.2,96,176.4,192 kHz/

010001

Subject: <none> From: SS To: "Waldo R. Petralba" <sinigangcartel@yahoo.com> Date: February 3, 2005

doy,

had to cancel the PI vacation trip. landed this web designing gig in this frisco-based outfit. so far so good. if my schedule permits, will visit later next year. will get in touch then. thanks.

sent from my blackberry wireless handheld

Track 5 Conversions in C minor Prestissimo

DOWNLOADS

ARTIST	ALBUM	SIZE	PROGRESS	SEEDS	3	PEERS
Pinback	Summer in Abaddon	40 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Wes Montgomery	Talkin' Verve	43 MB	>>>>>>	34%	76	12
I'm Not a Gun	We Think as Instruments	53 MB	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	58%	323	81
Mew	Frengers	40 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Everything But The Girl	Annal Card Llaget	10 140	ALERT!	0.40/	70	40
Miles Davis			ALERII			
Air 🔰	OU ARE LOW	ON	DISK SPA	CF &		EMORY
Thievery Corporation						
Hum	DELET		ES IMMED	JIATE	LY	
Tool	Lateralus	40 1010		0076	JZJ	
Fleetwood Mac	Rumors	53 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Zero 7	When It Falls	40 MB	>>>>>>	34%	76	12
Biffy Clyro	Infinity Land	43 MB	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	58%	323	81
Theloniuos Monk	Quartet w John Coltrane	53 MB	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	58%	76	12
Lali Puna	Faking the Books	43 MB	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	89%	323	81
John Scofield	Groove Elation	53 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Call and Response	Winds Take Shape	40 MB	>>>>>>	34%	76	12
Medeski, Martin & Wood	Combustication	43 MB	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	58%	323	81
Jimmy Smith	Root Down Live!	53 MB	>>>>	20%	43	14
Self	Subliminal Plastic Motives	53 MB	>>>>	20%	76	12
Radiohead with Sigur Ros	Corporation	43 MB	>>>>>>	34%	323	81
K's Choice	Cocoon Crash	53 MB	>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	58%	76	12

Track 6: Analogue Soul

Everything starts out as analog—light burning films, sound magnetized by mics, even words before we type. At some point, all of them wore an organic form. I never really thought about why the old stuff attracted me so much. Sometimes, I see them as relics of eras I can escape to. Most of the time, I'm simply awestruck by the inventors and pioneers who've influenced the course of our lives. These guys worked with nothing but curiosity, necessity, and pure analog imagination.

I was nine when I first saw my father's turntable, I was just about to finish the cassette phase but not quite in my CD stage yet. I was craving new tunes that day, but I had spent my allowance on *Bazooka* and *Sarsi*. Unable to rent a CD in *Soundtraxx* [Soundtraxx was the village hook-up in those days. Unlike the choices available at the local Betamax and VHS shops, their CD collection was sparse, but ten pesos got you a week's worth of hi-def listening pleasure], and having grown weary of my cassette collection, I rummaged around the house for a new fix.

The turntable was tucked away in the most forgettable spot in our garage. It was a sorry sight to behold. Scratches stained the once transparent dust cover; there were blotches of white mold on the round rubber platter; the tiny knobs and levers for adjusting pitch and speed creaked like rusty door hinges; the tone-arm slumped on its cradle, tired and vexed; the skin of the plinth had already faded, as if it had forgotten the elegant black of its former self.

It was a surprise to see the pea-sized bulb come to life, then. The bulb shed smoky tangerine on the mirror-like rivets which served as a guide for rotation speed. It was still alive! Yet the platter wasn't turning. I opened its shell at once, only to find the rubber gear belts broken by time. But that didn't daunt me. I needed my fix, and quick. I could already hear the theme song of *Macgyver* in the background. I ran to the bedroom and yanked the shoe strings right out of my brand new *Nikes*.

So instead of listening to music that afternoon, I ended up trying to fix my father's *Technics* turntable. Needles to say, the turntable never sang that day. Obviously, one needs more than a couple of shoe strings to fix something as sophisticated as the gramophone.

Years later, a friend asked me to accompany him to a shop that refurbishes turntables. I seized the opportunity, despite the fact that we had to negotiate traffic from Parañaque to Makati with immaculate patience.

Ka Rene's shop was a few blocks away from the newly reincarnated Cash and Carry. The shop was small, a bit bigger than a pair of king-sized beds. All sorts of speakers, amplifiers, and turntables crammed together. There were stickers on the door. Most of them were logos, brand names, but others were more telling. Stickers such as "tube-guru" or "tubaholic" caught my attention and I wondered about the real price to earn them. Inside, a fat, leather couch lay against the length of the shop, with both ends flanked by high-backed chairs. We sat on the brown couch at once, anxious and giddy to meet the proprietor. A horde of speakers and turntables scattered all about the prim blue carpet. The turntables looked like ceremonial altars, and the speakers, like giant chess rooks of different sizes, shapes, and colors. To our left was a glass facade, from floor to ceiling, its width spanning no more than three doors. A stiff aluminium rack showcased an array of tin boxes topped by a couple of glass bulbs to the pedestrians. To our right, two doors, a toilet and a storage room for tools and inventory. The walls were white and spare just like the fluorescent light beaming on top of our heads. We marveled at the novelties before us, but only because they appeared delicate and expensive. We were clueless about high-end stereo culture and its attendant jargon, so after only a few minutes, we found ourselves talking about the brown, cozy couch.

When he emerged from the storage room, I realized the room wasn't for storage at all. It was his repair station, much like the stalls of locksmiths and watchmakers found outside groceries and tricycle stations. We stood up and introduced ourselves. But before we could state our business, he broke the vibe and said, "*Maupo muna kayo*." Then he returned to his workstation. He looked like he was in his fifties, but perhaps he was older. He wore white sleeveless sandos, blue puruntongs, and slippers. He had a square chin, broad lips, and kind eyes. And there was something in his voice that captivated me. It wasn't that he spoke in an animated or booming manner. His voice was placid, delivered in subdued tones. And he raised his eyebrows and tilted his head skyward when he ended his sentences.

He came back with a record in hand and knelt on the floor. He drew the record from its jacket with care. After gently placing the jacket by his side, he wiped the jet-black disc in slow, circular motions, eyes focused on the empty street. He held the record by its edge with the tip of his thumbs and index fingers before carefully setting it in the spinning platter. After a meticulous status sweep of every knob and wire, he turned the amplifier on. That solitary click resonated across the entire room. He then turned to face us and offered some coffee. "*Instant lang ha.*" While waiting, my eyes focused on the globular vacuum tubes that were presently giving off an ember-like glow. This is where the magic happens, I mused. I placed my palms on top and felt the warmth emanating from it. When he returned with our java, the tubes were already bright and hot. Ka Rene perceived it was time for some jazz. He knelt beside the player again. As his index finger cupped the tone-arm's handle, I asked him why he still preferred planting the needle on the record manually when surely he knew about the latest, automatic models. He was silent until we were well into the jazz, until he was satisfied with the levels and decibels. He took an unhurried sip from his cup before he spoke. "*Old school tayo eh.*"

The next time I saw Ka Rene, I had already decided to buy a new turntable. My father's player was beyond repair, he said.

Now it is good to know that I'm proud of being what you call an "informed consumer," unlikely to fall prey to the quirks of the impulsebuyer. Years ago, I asked my sister to shop with me for a new pair of jeans. She obliged with ecstatic halleluiahs, for I had been wearing the same old pair for almost a decade. We scrimmaged against the crowds of *Glorietta* 2 & 4, *Landmark*, *Greenhills*, *Shangri-la* and *Megamall*, all in one day. By the time I had found "the one," the sides of my hips were red with blisters. But it was well worth it. I couldn't have found it without my only sibling.

Anyway, when I arrived at Ka Rene's shop for the second time, I had to wait for him to conclude his business with another patron. The client was giving the detailed specs of his custom-made amplifier. *"Tubero ka na nga, nag di-D-I-Y ka na eh,"* Ka Rene told him.

I had done some research on sound technology, but to this day, how they first captured and reproduced sound boggles me. How could they have even considered the project remotely possible? They say sound waves are captured as grooves on waxed cylinder. They say sound is reproduced by a stylus which 'senses' these grooves, frozen like pictures. During the turntable's infancy, each musician performed in front of a cone-like cylinder while the turntable carved the vibrations of the air into a record. That was the closest they got to "mixing" every instrument in the ensemble. The technology developed with the invention of the microphone. They covered the record in a thin metal coat to serve as the master copy for all the other records that would be pressed. It was easier to comprehend the inner workings of digital recording. It made sense to me. But grooves? Grooves!? This wonderful invention was truly beyond me. For how could sound descend on something so tangible and remain there? How could something so transient, so ethereal be given form?

We were listening to a Neil Young concert one day. My friend commented that what the turntable really did was emboss the exact same air pressure configurations and acoustics that day in the 60's. "That there record is air captured and seen with ears."

Meanwhile, an important component of the research needed an equal amount of attention as well: fieldwork. Regarding equipment and gear, specialty magazines such as *Stereophile* and web-based audio communities such as *wiredstate.com* will serve as excellent starter-kits for the fledgling, but what I enjoyed most was talking with people I'd chance upon in audio shops. Some are self-proclaimed gear-heads who talk about the math and physics: "I really do prefer my tracking force-gauge calibrated in milliNewtons," someone told me once. It took several days for me to realize he was talking about cartridges. Some prefer to leave the science out of the equation so they can listen to the music. One time, I asked an audiophile about speakers and optimum distance. He simply made me notice how we were able to talk comfortably and without strain even though the speakers were blasting in front of us.

On another occasion, I overheard a conversation about equalizer settings. When three frequencies are the only available choices, the high, mid and the low, there's nothing to worry about. But more than that, say, ten or twenty frequencies, one would have to rouse a whole spectrum of the auditory armada to appreciate equalizers. A woman in the group declared that settings would depend on the type of music or instrument one wants to hear, an isolation of frequencies of sorts. Another remarked that the rule of thumb he always followed was the "reenactment" of a performance, an approximation of the real thing, like an orchestra performing right in front of you. That's why audiophiles always ask the type of music you're into, so they can tell you what sort of frequencies to look for. Another man wanted to change the topic to speaker wires. I tried to hide the smirk on my face. I thought he'd be snubbed. *Your friends are talking about equalizers and the cosmos and you want to talk about speaker wires? Come on...* But his fellows just as quickly jumped on the issue—its metallic compositions, its compatibility with amperes and ohms. "You lose 1db for every ten-feet of wire," I heard someone say. Then I wondered: *why would anyone need more than ten feet of wire?*

It got weirder and weirder after that. Audiophiles will go on and on with words like room acoustics, physics, sound depth, soundstage and gravity for days. Yes gravity. Apparently, some audiophiles feel the need to suspend their turntables in zero gravity to get rid of the most minute vibration and noise.

Because records are extinct in the mainstream market, enthusiasts hunt for them in flea markets and swap meats. And because piracy has not turned its gaze on the market yet, the dig becomes sweeter. The price can range from ten pesos to any amount one's gullibility and/or sanity will permit. But patrons with stable mental constitutions will usually appraise a record based on the occurrence of scratches and the cover's mint, or lack thereof. Plastic covers are optional. Usually, people don't mind, especially when it comes to cheaper records. They believe the thin film shrinks over time and damages the sleeve. Cubao, Makati Cinema Square, Raon. These are the usual spots in Manila. But here's a thought: the unexpected gem of a record is waiting in a basement or attic of some uncle or aunt, a lolo or a lola. And in my experience, I find they are more than willing to share and pass these records on to the next generation. So perhaps, it is not so hard to understand sound reproduction after all.

Back in Ka Rene's shop, I was getting psyched by the minute. His client left after some time, and we were finally alone. After the pleasantries, he proceeded to give me a rundown of turntables according to my budget. Enthusiasts call it an audition. He billed it as a "wine-tasting experience of auditory proportions." And he was going to be my connoisseur. He briefly complimented each candidate, then connected it to different sets of speakers, pre-amps, and amplifiers. With each prospect, he played the same record over and over—a reference record the listener is familiar with. "Anong album ba ang kilala mo hanggang buto?" asked Ka Rene. He then proceeded to inquire if I heard this or that, switching from one turntable

to another. He waited for my reaction after he asked if I could hear the drumsticks 'brush' against the rim of the snare drum. "*Rinig mo yung pahid*?"

With another model, he showed me how the tone-arm automatically raised itself and returned at rest when the record ended. First, the dead-air crackles took over. A subtle, hypnotic pulse throbbed in the undertones before the arm ascended, and then, silence. Finally, I asked, "What's the difference, really, between analog and digital?" I told him about Mawi, the first true-blooded audiophile I had the pleasure of meeting. During one of my visits to his house, he borrowed my iPod and played it through his system as an experiment. His eyes were vacant but his ears were listening for something I could not discern. "The digital hiss is an unwanted nuance," Mawi said. He told me, as if it were some grand secret, that his beef with digitals was really about the low frequencies. "CDs sound bright. Very bright. That's the problem right there." He told me about a term he called the brown sound. "Whatever happens, a voice from a telephone will always sound better than a voice from a mobile. That Edison, man! He got it right the first time. And you, my young apprentice, would be wise to junk your CD's and iPod altogether, sell the house immediately, and take the money to your nearest analog dealer." I looked at Ka Rene and waited for his reaction. He gave me an awkward smile. I did not dare press the issue.

I had all sorts of plans for my new turntable that day. I cancelled my engagements and locked myself in, hoping to play records until the next life. I'd already chosen the occasion's debut album: the original soundtrack to the movie *La Bamba*. The first track I'd play would be "*Oh Donna,*" by Ritchie Valens. I cleaned the dusty record using a microfiber cloth soaked in a mixture of water and *Joy* dishwashing soap, placing it in the spinning platform first so I didn't have to hold it. As the cloth around my finger gathered dust from the vinyl, the player suddenly comatosed. It still had power, for the pea-sized bulb still shed its orange light. I inhaled deeply, called Ka Rene and informed him about the situation. I was lucky, he said. He was going to be home the whole day. I flew with a purpose. I braved the streets once more, inching my way through grid-locks as I scrolled through my ipod to keep me occupied. *Eighty gigs, eleven thousand three hundred and twenty six songs. Stick with a tune, man*!

I was taken aback when I entered Ka Rene's home-office—a *bo-dega*—where piles and piles of dead or dying equipment were stacked in high racks. The sun was absent and the lights were dim. There was a funk in the humid air which reminded me of school buses and old cars. The gray, cement floor was covered in dust which stuck to the hem of my jeans. His working table revealed various tools: a soldering gun here, a magnifying scope there. Copious amounts of little fuses and gears were hidden in small pigeon-hole drawers. As he proceeded to dislodge the screws of my player, I saw a neatly framed medical diploma hanging by the wall in front of his table.

I was surprised to find that the drive motor of my new player did not rely on wheels and belts, but on opposite polarities of a magnetic field which actually kept the motor afloat in zero-gravity. This technology produced a consistent and smoother spin which prevented the needle from skating out of the grooves. "*Bato-balani 'yan eh, walang kupas,*" he said without looking at me, "*'di tulad nung sintas sa player mo*." He opened a small drawer and handed the tarnished strings to me.

We soon got to talking about the recipient of the diploma, his daughter, who worked as a nurse abroad. While he brought my player back to life, I told him about my sister, a doctor, who was getting married and preparing to leave in a couple of months, also to work abroad. I confessed that sometimes, I secretly wished she would fail some exam or requirement so she wouldn't have any choice but to stay in the motherland. I shared my unease with an anecdote my father told her, with hopes of convincing her to reconsider. He likened her condition to a tribe that teaches its flock how to make fire, only to see the enlightened members of the fold defect to the neighbouring tribe and capitalize on their new-found knowledge. He kept silent as if he didn't hear a word, continuing with the repair. A split-second swivet crept after my words. I was afraid I had insulted him.

The rebirth of my player was in its final stages, and after the last screw was bolted, he suddenly spoke and told me about his kids in America. Their youngest daughter, who still lived with him and his wife, was graduating from college in a few months and had already announced her intentions of leaving. When I asked him how he had reacted, he said simply, and not without a smile, "not a word, *iho*, not a word."

Track 7 Saturn Return

"Kuya favor. Can you help me edit these personal statements for my applications? Think of it as your birthday gift to me."

"I'm not an editor. I'm a writer."

"You are a bum. And you fart too much."

"29 eh? Nice. Saturn returns."

"Huh?"

"The Saturn return? See, Saturn takes about 29 years or so to complete one orbit. So on your 29th year, Saturn will have returned to the exact same spot it occupied when you were born."

"And?"

"They say it's a time of great upheaval in one's life—a right of passage of sorts. If you fail, the consequences will haunt you in full force by the time it returns again, when you're 59 or 60. If you make the grade, then it becomes your path to wisdom in old age. You know Van Gogh decided to be a painter instead of a minister when he turned 30?"

"Yeah, then he chopped his ears off before killing himself."

"That's beside the point."

"So, will you look at the statements? Sigue *na*, I'll buy you all those records when I get there . . ."

"You know you lose 1db for every ten feet of wire?"

"Are you high or something?"

"Doctors earn a pretty decent living here."

"My dear brother, you are a moron. It has never been about the money. The only thing your Saturn is asking me is when I should give that letter to Mama and Papa . . . you know the letter we always talked about? Maybe it's time. I'm thinking I should give it before the wedding. What do you think?"

Track 8 Analogue Soul (Reprise)

I haven't seen Ka Rene since. And to this day, the difference between analog and digital, if the difference exists at all, eludes me. It's something very personal I guess—something we cannot impose on others. What is profound to one person may be trivial to the next. And the best thing we can hope for is an occasional email, a video chat or a picture posted on the internet to remind ourselves that in the silence of distance, there is no longing, only patience.

So when the day is done, I boil a pinch of tea and light some candles. I relieve my battered iPod from its duties and recharge it in a corner of my room. I flip through my LP's, waiting for a memory to take hold. A record slides out of its cover, tranquil and calm. The soft cotton cloth wipes the vinyl in trance-like motions. The running platter embraces the record, spinning, spinning. I steady my hands before I cradle the tone-arm and send it off. For a moment, I look at the cartridge as it undulates with the subtle curves of the record in graceful dips and jumps, the stylus barely kissing the grooves. I make the necessary speed adjustments, but only after I take a sip from the steaming cup. I sit down and close these eyes so my ears can see: a saxophone player's neck, veins bulging, the strings of a guitar, still shivering in sustain, a mad, sweat-drenched maestro, preparing for the climax, and the ivory keys of a piano, caressed by long and elegant fingers. When the light returns and the final note is fulfilled, I know the player will automatically lift her slender arm and place it by her side. But I stand up and catch it anyway. Tenderly, I bring it back home.

Analogue Souls

A Cosmic Verb Recording

Performed by the Doybarmonic Candle Orchestra Conducted by Professor Cristina P. Hidalgo

All tracks written by Waldoferus except track 4 written by Waldoferus, Saçaworks and track 7 written by Waldoferus, Milkymilk.

Approximate running time: 5,500 words

Produced by Ka Rene & Waldoferus Engineered & Mixed by Mawi Mastered by Bundy the Baboy Dog Recorded Aug 22-30, 2010 at Sinigang Cartel Studios, Manila, Philippines Cover concept by The Pheytz Thanks: april, arlene, art, bambi, bigz, camille, carljoe, caty, choster, elena, ham, jeena, jenny, json, louella, max, myka, nat, pay, preach

Sagaworks appears courtesy of Leave Us Records Milkymilk appears courtesy of Bato Balani Records

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Campfire in August

Rowena T. Torrevillas

ver the years, we have set up camp across the country, overlooking lakes or bodies of water large and small: Lake Thompson in the silvery winter fastnesses of South Dakota; Mary's Lake by Estes Park in Colorado, Santa Rosa in a

moonlit field in New Mexico; Lake of the Ozarks in the spring rain; North Fork, Wyoming; even the water meadows by the Atlantic in Connecticut where, unknown to us, the tide rose at midnight and almost lifted the tent from the meadow onto the beach and into the ocean, as seawater rose all around us. (The following morning, the college kids in the site next to ours said blithely, "We thot yew kneewoo...").

What we didn't know was that the most satisfying of the campfires would be ten minutes away from our house, at Coralville Lake. A campfire satisfies the elsewhereness that is our lives' endemic condition, granting us the simultaneity of being both outdoors and in.

Everywhere we've gone, tent camping, by sedan or van, and now in the Winnebago, we've observed—learned, and lived by—the unspoken etiquette of the road: don't ask the names of your fellow travelers. Share the embers from your fire with anyone in need of light, offer a jump-start, or exchange cordial observations about the driftwood that's lying on the sandbar on the riverbank and looking like a supine giant...

But respect the illusion of invisibility that motivates all our wanderings: we seek the forests, the lakeside, the seemingly endless ribbon of highway because we want to be, essentially, alone under the night sky, the stars wheeling high overhead. The harp music rising from the next campfire and filling the Grand Canyon's north rim—that is a gift, the supreme grace unasked. We will never know their names, but we carry the imprint of their fleeting presence with us always.

Now it is sunset, and as the dusk sends long shadows across the green and gold on the grass, a herd of deer comes silently out of the woods across us: one, then three, then there are seven—a yearling, a stag, several does. They start drinking at the water's edge.

Lem builds the fire, and I—feeling invincible in the jeans I've changed into to frustrate the bugs and gnats buzzing at my shins—I look around at the other campsites, where fires are also starting to replace the afterglow, establishing the primal sense of shelter offered by the sight of these controlled tongues of flame licking and dancing sinuously before us.

The little boys of summer, who like us are wishing the hour would go on and summer stretch onward endlessly, are running through the tall grass until their mother calls them into their camper van: time for bed.

To the east, the moon is starting to rise: it's grown past half-moon, not quite three quarters. High overhead, there's only one star as yet, shining over this clearing in the woods. "It's saying 'Make all your wishes; I'll be here for a long time yet,' " Lem says, and he stands to add another couple of thick neatly-sawn and seasoned logs to the fire.

The wind off the lake is cool against my arms. Around us the wisps of smoke from other fire-rings in this federally-run campground lend us a comforting sense of human solidarity—no bears to come charging redeyed and salivating into our midst, as the kids toast S'mores on the last campfire before school starts in two weeks. It is all tame and manageable, these outdoors, so we start thinking of the gypsies, making their nomadic trek from India and what we think of now as Egypt (where they got their generic name, after all): tinkers and horse-traders and plaintive untrained musicians, wandering up toward central Europe: a trail of language and romance.

Lem starts to wonder aloud about how basic hygiene was possible in those brightly-painted caravans. "In the bushes," he decides. And we're off and running on a mildly hysterical riff: the dark-eyed Gypsy maiden, stricken with constipation or diarrhea, hurrying off into the copse of trees, lifting her bright Gujarati skirt with its tiers of brazenly-hued ruffles, while in the too-near distance the tambourines hiss and clatter, to cover the embarrassment of the most fundamental of bodily noises she's trying not to emit as she squats in the hedges doing her business.

Here in our campsite in Coralville, Iowa—ten minutes from our house—the crickets are populating the twilight expanse with their chirring; an owl hoots, and among the trees by the water's edge, there's a resonant rhythm building up that's not unlike the call of waterfowl: a tree frog, it must be. I don't know its name, or what it would be. But its sound is comforting, almost like a blanket thrown around us and all the living creatures, sentient or vegetal, in this serene place under the stars.

In the home across the world where I'd lived as a child and young adult, my father had built two ponds with his own hands. Singing frogs lived among the lotus pads, while farther down the dirt road leading to the beach, the sea-waves on the coral shoals washed their counterpoint to the frogs and cicadas and the trickle from the fountain on our lawn. *There, here.* The moon rose—*then, now*—casting ripples across space and making the world—water, leaves, tiny wings susurrating in trees, stray wind from the mountain range—all, seem safe and enfolding. And offering hope that the season, high summer, would be there for ever. **

MacBride Woods in Autumn

October 8

he wind rushing through the treetops on the hillside at Mac-Bride sounds like a distant sea.

The woods are just starting to reach their peak of color, autumn on the cusp of full ripeness. The tree across this tent is extravagantly gold, with some pale green among the orange and yellow just to remind the eye where all the wealth came from. The evergreens set off the transient glory.

Green and gold, like some galleon old/ Maple leaf, now set thy sail/ Out of every autumn gale,/ Drifting down the breezes...my mother used to sing to me, and then to my daughter. I had forgotten I knew the words to that song until she started singing it again to my baby daughter. Given just a little more time, she would have sung it to her great-grandson too.

Last night the moonlight streamed through the forest, a brightness that was enchantment: misty silver Camelot; one could see the young knight striding lightly among tall tree trunks, his shock of thick wheat-colored hair turned silver in the moon-dappled light.

My own knight, his short-cropped hair sprinkled with silver, rises from the camp chair to set another weather-seasoned chunk of firewood on the campfire. The stars fill the sky as they only did in my childhood across the world.

The dining tent, set up beside our white-and-blue Winnebago Le-Sharo, looks like Camelot, with the netting at either entrance held open like arched curtains. Hemingway would also have been pleased.



Me & Mom at Forest Camp

This morning the bumblebees and late butterflies alight on the asters and baby's-breath growing wild at the edge of our campsite: a posy readymade, planted there with Nature's random yet somehow deliberate esthetic, a generosity that I feel suddenly undeserving of. A spider-web strung across the entrance to the path through the woods and down to the lake (a flash of water through the trees): it catches the light and. . .my heart?—the metaphor's far too facile, but I let it go. The bumblebee is too heavy for the aster, which bends under its passing weight, so it moves on having milked the flower of its nectar.

Another brief wave, as wind rustles through the trees. A red-andgold leaf sails from the woods across to where I'm sitting, settles on me, right over my heart. I hear my Mom saying, *Wena. Be happy*.

It's been two months since I last heard my mother's voice. But on a day like this, I cannot be anything except happy. **

Proserpina's Song

ot-quite spring. In a week, when we return to the woods over Lake MacBride, I'll write a springtime essay to round out this cycle. But today is Saint Patrick's Day ("the wearing o' the green"), and it's three days short of the vernal equinox, so I can't yet write truthfully in the spirit of e.e. cummings, as in the poem about childhood and the beginnings of the awareness of mortality, "in Just-/spring." But I will, as soon as springtime arrives.

Today it's 80°F, and it feels like early summer. We've skipped spring altogether, while the calendar tells us it's still winter. Record-breaking highs...or something's broken and though Nature has put on a smiling face, I think the earth is trying to tell us something and the wayward children aren't paying attention. Men gave names to the stars and assigned hours to the day, so we don't know how to listen when things such as seasons go out of whack.

Last night, the planets Jupiter and Venus were aligned, as they have been for some weeks now, in the Western sky...the first of the celestial lights to turn on as we sat in the afterglow. We sat by the fire-ring, where flames leaped up from the windfall branches foraged from the grass at the edge of the campsite, the waters gleaming darkly through the trunks of the still-leafless trees in these woods. "Whose woods these are" belong to us, the taxpayers whose pittance—a dollar on our annual income-tax forms, what we check off each April—support the many moments we've spent at this very spot, of late: we have arrived at that elusive moment we come here seeking. The sky is filled with stars whose clarity make one think there must be a bright room out there, and our sky—the firmament—is merely a curtain, a blanket draped around our mortal circumstances, through which illuminations into the celestial randomly gleam. Oh, God, make small/ That old star-eaten blanket of the sky,/That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie. Thus wrote the British poet T.E. Hulme; a half-remembered snatch of verse, a passage on Imagism from the textbook my mother had written long ago: a line whose meaning—as with all inherited wisdom—I only now think I fully understand, because I am experiencing it.

In the morning, sitting by the smoldering remains of last night's campfire and sharing Lem's cup of coffee, we are seeing the flash of young men, the early sun glittering off their still-winter white shoulders, running at the bottom of the hill... along the lake banks, following the woodland trail around the bend of the inlet, and up across the opposite shore. As they run past the bluff, their shadows keep pace with them; where they had been running in twos, there are now four figures running along the road.

These runners, passing below the trees in groups of two or three, must be the Solon High School cross-country team, doing a training run on this sunny Saturday morning. The Spartans, they call themselves; and I think how right it is, enacting millennia later the legend that gave rise to the athletic event of modern times, the marathon. Do they think about that first occurrence from which this morning's exertions originated? how the runner during the Greco-Persian wars was sent from Marathon to Athens with the news that the Athenian forces had won ... only to collapse after he burst into the agora, shouting "Νενικήκαμεν" (Nenikékamen, 'We have won.'). The runner reaching the end of the race, his own heart giving out as he relayed his message on the Battle of Marathon, one day in August or September 490 years before Christ was born. Herodotus gives an alternative account: that during the Greco-Persian wars, the messenger Pheidippides or Philippides ran from Athens to Sparta asking for help, and then ran back, a distance of 240 kilometers each way.

Whether it was from Marathon to Athens, or Athens to Sparta, the young men of Solon, a small town in the middle of a continent two millennia away, are celebrating that heroic moment in the shining glow of their shoulders, glinting through the trees, along the shores of the lake in the midmorning sun and in the early springtime of their as-yet unweary day. In the cove below, a woman is unmooring her boat, ready to show her little daughter how to cast for fish. In a minute or two, it's there: a small white boat in the deeper reaches of the lake.

BY the flickering of the campfire, I look down at my feet. The shoes I am wearing are my favorite Bass walking shoes—pale denim clogs with leather edging and rubber soles, a gift from my daughter several Christmases ago. I have seen a photo of Brad Pitt wearing similar shoes while vacationing with Angelina Jolie in Cambodia or Capri—who in heck cares where Brange-lina are, anyway? ... but knowing that Brad Pitt wears similar shoes makes up for the fact that now I do not wear dress pumps whenever I travel overseas. I have promised my daughter I'd wear those sensible shoes, so she'll be assured I won't stumble and fall during one of the trips I take alone. As though entering a holy place, we remove our shoes when we go through that final security checkpoint just before boarding the aircraft; because Brad Pitt wears them too, I am now not embarrassed to see my denim clogs in the plastic basket riding down the conveyor, on their way toward being reunited with my feet.

Those shoes have crossed more miles than I can keep track of, particularly this past long year: conferences, workshops, visits home to see my mother.

Next month, I will be making that trip across the world—a continent and an ocean away from these woods in not-quite-spring, where the undergrowth is only now starting to show the first sturdy greenness of a new season. The first of these essays, notes about our campfire forays into the woods above Lake MacBride, was dated August 11 last year: ten days before we got word that my mother was gone. Gone where? —past that "old star-eaten blanket of sky" that wraps around me? This will be the first trip—after that longest and most numb of voyages, to lay her to rest—that I will be making, where I will arrive with no mother to welcome me home.

This past year, as I have written elsewhere, I've sometimes felt like a small child wandering around in a forest and waiting for a grownup to show me the way home; looking back at the cycle of meditations I've written at Lake MacBride, I realize they've all been, in a way, about looking for my mother. It's a reversal of the ancient legend: how Ceres, the earth mother, searched the world and went down to hell to rescue her daughter Proser-

pina. She crossed the river Styx and bargained with the god of the dark world, so she could bring her daughter back out into the light. Because the daughter had eaten three seeds of the pomegranate fruit while she had been held captive in Hades, as part of the bargain to get her



Photo taken by LMT, Sunday morning, 6/10/12. Lake MacBride state park

daughter back, the Earth Mother had to return Proserpina to the regions of the dead for three months each year. The mother only got her daughter back into the land of the living after the cold months when nothing grew as the mother mourned. Thus was the springtime born.

New leaves, green under the dry brownness underfoot, are springing up in this tree-clad hillside above Lake MacBride, halfway around the Earth from where I was born. I am on my way there, Mom, arriving on your birthday. I'll put flowers on that grassy spot where we laid you to rest: a brown ugly gash in the earth seven months ago and now blanketed in green. But that wasn't you, not you any longer; you were never there in that place, as you are not there now. I find you everywhere.

Facebook post on June 10, 2012

Hagkis ng hangin sa bundok na bato, Igkas ng panganib sa mga sungay sa dagat

Eli Rueda Guieb III

Mga tala sa journal 13 Agosto 1997, Miyerkules Taytay, Hilagang Palawan

Tumuloy kami ng tatlo kong kasamahan (dalawang mangingisda at isang NGO worker) sa Pabellon. Pabellon ang tawag sa magkakambal na islang ito. Mga islang hindi naman isla, dahil kung tutuusin, dalawang matatarik na bundok na bato ang magkakambal na islang ito na nagkaugat sa gitna ng dagat.

Noong 1995, noong ginagawan ko ng video documentary ang research ng Tambuyog sa Palawan [NGO na kinabibilangan ko noon] ay napagawi na kami rito sa Pabellon. Sa likod ng isla kami nagtago nang sumagupa ang subasko (malabagyong hangin at ulan) habang kami ay nagsu-shooting. Ang ganda-ganda ng likod nitong Pabellon.

Kanina, nang muli ko itong dalawin, ay maganda ang panahon, pero malakas ang alon. Dumudulas ang bangka sa mga alon. Sa harap ng Pabellon kami dumaong. Kung alin ang harap at likod ng isla ay hindi naman talaga tiyak. Nakasanayan na lang tawaging harap ng isla ang bahaging may mahaba at manipis na hilata ng mapuputing buhangin.

Nagpunta kaming apat sa tinatawag nilang ilog sa loob. Isa itong malaking kuweba na may tubig-dagat sa gitna. Malawak na bilog ang "ilog." Ayon sa kuwento, hindi pa alam ng mga tagarito kung saan ang lagusang dinadaluyan ng tubig-dagat papasok sa malawak na bilog na ilog. Malalim rin ito; siguro ay mga limang dipa rin ang lalim. Naglundagan ang mga kasamahan ko sa ilog. Hindi ako nakatalon, ewan ko kung bakit. Isang bagay ang tiyak, ginapangan ako ng kaba, hindi ko talaga maintindihan kung bakit.

Umatungaw sa kulob ng yungib ang kanilang mga galak na hiyawan habang tumatalon. Magkasabay na lumutang sa ere ang kanilang mga sabik na hiyawan at mga nagmamadaling katawan. Parang galit na kulog na umalingawngaw ang tunog ng kulob na bagsak ng kanilang mga katawan sa tubig.

Kumapit lang ako sa isang nakausling bato, ingat na ingat na inilugay ang mga paa sa tubig, at dahan-dahang isinuko ang katawan sa ilog. Mahiyain ang tunog ng lapat ng aking katawan sa tubig. Malamig ang tubig. Pinapupunta ako ng mga kasamahan ko sa gitna, pero ewan ko, hindi ko talaga maintindihan ang takot na biglang gumapang sa aking katawan.

Baka higupin ako sa ilalim, sigaw ko sa mga kasamahan ko.

Kung tutuusin ay ligtas ang lugar: malinaw na malinaw ang tubig, kitang-kita ang ilalim. Puting-puting buhangin ang ilalim. Matatalim ang maliliit na usli ng bato sa paligid ng nakalubog na bahagi ng kuweba. Sakali mang higupin ako ng koryente ng lagusan patungong dagat, tiyak na makikita ako't maililigtas kaagad ng mga kasamahan ko. Iyon ay kung simbilis ng kanilang langoy at sisid ang higop ng nakakubling lagusan. At iyon ay kung sila man ay hindi rin hihigupin ng nakamasid na trahedya.

Pagkatapos lumangoy, sa labas ng kuweba, ay pinagmasdan kong maigi ang dambuhalang batong ito. Manghang-mangha ako sa tikas ng dalawang higanteng ito. Pinamamahayan ang mga kuweba nito ng mga balinsasayaw na ang pugad ay pinagkakakitaan ng milyon-milyong piso ng kung kanino man naka-lease ang mga islang ito. Ginagamit sa paggawa ng nido soup ang pugad ng mga balinsasayaw, at ineexport ito sa ibang bansa.

Marami nang kuwento ng kamatayan ang narinig ko hinggil sa mayayabang na batong ito: mga upahang manggagawang inangkin ng mga talim ng bundok, sinakmal ng mga di-inaasahang pangil ng mga nakausling bato sa mapanlinlang na hikayat ng kuweba, nilamon ng mga nanlalapang bunganga ng bangin na lihim na nagkukubli sa kapangyarihan ng dilim, inilibing sa mga traydor na salikop ng mga bituka ng dugtong-dugtong na mga yungib.

Para sa isang dayong tulad ko, magandang tingnan ang Pabellon. Pero kung maririnig ang mga kuwento ng kamatayan at kung paanong ang islang ito'y ipinaangkin ng pamahalaan para gawing patubuan ng yaman, patongpatong na trahedya ang imaheng isinasalubong nito sa aking isip. Hindi ko maisip kung anong kahirapan o kawalang-pag-asa ang nagtutulak sa mga bata't binata't mga ama, mga Tagbanua at Cuyonen, mga tagarito at dayo, upang lakas-loob na akyatin ang mga delikadong tipak ng bato at ibayubay ang sarili sa rurok ng mga matatalim at matatarik nitong dalisdis na bato. Natutuhan na yata nilang maging manhid sa kanilang mga kamatayan. Hindi ko rin maisip kung anong pagkatao mayroon ang nangangapital sa kalakal na ito upang ipain sa kamatayan ang mga mamamayang hindi makatanggi–o hindi marunong tumanggi–sa maliit na suweldong kanilang tinatanggap. Natutuhan na rin yata ng mga kapitalistang ito na maging manhid sa kamatayan ng iba.

Maalon at malakas ang hangin nang paalis na kami sa Pabellon. Tumatalon-talon ang bangkang sinasakyan namin. Parang gusto akong itilapon ng bangka sa dagat.

Habang palayo kami ay lalong gumaganda ang Pabellon. Hinihiwa at inuukit ng hanging dagat ang hugis at hubog–ang bawat sulok at talim–ng magkakambal na bundok na batong ito na natutuhang magkaugat sa gitna ng dagat.

Pero habang lumalayo ay nagmimistula ring dalawang kiming sungay ang dalawang matikas na higanteng batong ito sa gitna ng maalong laot.

Ang Lihim ng Tula: Isang Ehersisyo

Louie Jon A. Sanchez

ng pagtula ay parang pagsasalin din, at ginagamit ko ang salitang "salin" dito, hindi lamang upang tukuyin ang sarili kong danas ng pagsasalin ng tulang "What Poetry Does Not Say" ni Ophelia A. Dimalanta, ang tulang nais kong pagpukulan ng pagninilay sa pagkakataong ito. Sa loob mismo ng proseso ng pagsasalin ng tula, mayroong naisasaling pagpapakahulugan sa atin hinggil sa kung ano nga ba ang inililingid ng tula, o ng tunay nitong lihim. Naisasalin sa atin hindi lamang ang malalim na kabatiran ng nagsasalita sa tula, ng persona, tungkol sa pangunahing katangian ng tula bilang pahiwatig: bilang isang orkestrasyon ng mga salitang nagsasadula ng kahulugang naglalahad ngunit nagkukubli, nagsasabi sa ganap na katahimikan nito, kumikilos at nagpapadama sa mga piniling pananatili. Ito naman talaga sa palagay ko ang daigdig ng tula: ang daigdig ng mga kontradiksiyon. Kailangang nakalapag ang tula sa lupain ng samot-saring pag-uusig, ng kawalang katiyakan, ng maraming pagpopook at pagtutulad. Ang lupain ng tula ay ang madalas na pananahan sa gitna ng mga tagisan. Kaya kahit sa pagpapaliwanag hinggil sa kung ano ang hindi sinasabi ng tula, ang tanging naihandog lamang sa atin ng persona ay ang mga kaibhang palagiang tinatamasa. Oposisyon ang tawag natin sa mga bagay na ito, mga konpigurasyon sa isang estruktura ng pagpapakahulugan. Sa huli, nagiging ikatlong termino tuloy sa pagitan ng pagsasalaysay at paglilihim ang tula bilang pahiwatig—nagkakaroon ng tula dahil may pagpapakahulugang nalilikha sa pagtatambal ng dalawang pagtatagisan. Sa panahong tinatalikuran ang mga tradisyon, dumudulog tayo ngayon sa tula bilang bigkas ng kahulugan, at kahit na ang mismong salitang "kahulugan" ay isang pagpipigil (containment) ng salitang "hulog," na wari ba'y siya mismong dahilan ng mga mithiing makaunawa; may lingid tayong hangad na huwag mabulid, mahulog sa di maaarok na kailaliman. Ang unlaping ka+ at hulaping +an ang nagiging makahulugang mga panaklong na naglululan sa katuturan, sa kabatiran. Ngunit ang atin mismong pagkatao ang nagpapagunita sa atin na palaging magiging nasa lamang ang pagkakatalos sa lahat; kaya masasabing may tula sapagkat tinatanggap natin ang ating pag-iral sa mundo ng mga pangarap pagkagagap at dalisay at nakapagpapakuyom na mangha. Palaging nagkukulang ang salita, magtangka mang lagumin ang lahat.

Ano nga ba ang lihim ng tula? Sa pagsasalin ng tulang ito ni "Ma'am Ophie," kung tawagin namin siya noon, kaming kabataang manunulat na inaruga niya sa panahong itinitindig niya ang UST Center for Creative Writing and Studies, circa 2000, parang nasabi na niya ang lahat: "Sapagkat hindi nagsasabi ang tula;/ Naglilihim ito." Datapwa sa isang banda, parang hindi rin, dahil nga "naglilihim ito." Ito ang misteryo ng pagpapaliwanag ng tula na hindi maipaliwanag dahil kahit ang liwanag ng pagpapakahulugan ay nababasag sa kristalinong kariktan nito. Ang misteryong ito ay may kinalaman sa pagsasabi, at dahil nga gayon ay sa paglalahad ng tinig na umiiral sa anumang tula. Nagkakaroon ng anyo ang misteryosong bagay na ito dahil binibigkas ng isang personang pangunahing kaisipan (o "prime mover," sa wika ni Santo Tomas de Aquino). Sa klasikong tinuran, inilalarawan sa atin ang tinig sang-ayon sa pagtugon nito sa mga pampanulaang tendensiyakapag liriko, may kalapitan at introspeksiyong pinamamayanihan ng himig at madalas malapit sa mga poetikong anyo; kapag epiko, naglalahad ang nagsasalita hinggil sa mga pagkilos sa tagpuan ng panahon at espasyo; kapag dramatiko, nagsasakatawan at nagsasakamalayan ng katauhang karaniwa'y nagpapakilala o napapangalanan. Bago mag-usap hinggil sa kung ano ang hindi sinasabi ng tula ay unang usapin dapat ang kung ano ang nagsasalita. Kung si Virgilio S. Almario ang tatanungin, may "dalawang binhing butil ng tula" na makapaglalarawan sa ating tradisyonal na pananambitan—ang "paloob," na kinakatawan ng bugtong, bilang isang sining ng "paglikha ng hiwaga mula sa alam na ng lahat"; at ang "palabas" na kinakatawan ng salawikain, na "paglagom ng isang katotohanan mula sa mga nalikom at sari-saring karanasang pambalana." Maaaring magkaroon tayo ng isang eksplikasyon sa tinig ng tula ni Dimalanta kung susumahin natin ang epektong liriko nito, na nagdadalumat hinggil sa katangiang pampanulaan na nais niyang ipabatid sa isang kausap, halimbawa'y isa ring nagmamakata ng tila ba nag-uusisa sa isang maestra. May hiwaga ito, parang maysa-bugtong dahil nagpapahiwatig gamit ang mga halimbawa at ilustrasyon, ngunit sa isang banda'y nagpapaliwanag nga't parang masugid na nagtuturo—isang tanda ng papalabas at malasalawikaing himig. Pinagsasanib ng persona ang mga gawing ito ng pagsasabi upang isadula mismo sa pamamagitan ng pagsasakataga ang natatanging pagpapahalaga, pag-iingat, at pagpapabanal sa bagay na yaong "madaling malabag/ kaya nga't talagang anong bilis/ na nakatatalilis mula sa mapanlagom/ na ministeryo ng tula ..." Sadyang marunong ang personang ito sa pagpapadama at gumamit siya ng makapangyarihang mga imahen—mga sinekdoke (haplos, palipad-hangin, himig, pook, gunita) na mumuti bagaman matalik at tiyak na pinakaiibig. Pinaiiral ng persona ang bawat pagdama sa mga ito.

Ngunit nananatiling lihim ang lihim ng tula sa kabila ng napakaingat na pagninilay ng persona. Para rin siyang si Dimalanta, nang minsang usisain hinggil sa ibig sabihin ng tula: "Regarding poetry," wika niya, "definitions can only be general and tentative, oversimplified, personal and at times, ambiguous. Attribute this to the essential ineffable nature of poetry." Kahit sa kaniyang pagteteorya ng tula ay may gayunding pagdadalawang-loob ni Dimalanta: may sinasabi siya hinggil dito, ngunit tinatanggap niyang ang mga iyon ay nasa antas lamang ng munakala. May tendensiyang maging abstrakto at malabo ang bawat tangka, kaya sa tula, hinayaan ng persona na makumutan ang kaniyang paliwanag ng tapiserya ng mga imaheng nakapagtatanghal sa komplikadong pagbibigay-saysay sa matulaing danas. Naririyang tinatawag ang gunita ng isang "puspos na kopita" na tinatagasan ng lamang "tumatabang/ talagang lumalabnaw para hanguin pa/ sa mumunting patak ng salita." Naririyang bumabagting ito ng "marikit na himig" na nagpapagunita rin sa masuyong pag-ibig ng musikero sa kaniyang minamahal na instrumento, sa isang malamig na gabi. Isang maningning na konstelasyon ang isinamundo ng persona, isang daigdig ng mga walang-pagkaparam na mga kislap, pamumukadkad, at "paglulubid ng pahiwatig/ na umaahon sa pagkabunyag." Kung tititigan ang mga ito bilang konpigurasyon, may hinala akong ang lihim talaga ng tula ay hindi lamang nakatanim sa mga naunang itinindig na kontradiksiyon, kundi lalo't higit sa paglikhang nagaganap sa tuwing nagniniig ang mga magkakasalungat. Kosmos ang lumitaw sa katabangang sisikapin pa yatang himurin dahil baka nga sayang—"Mga puwang sa pagitan ng mga tala,/ Liwanag na di

napaparam sa langit/ Kahit malaon nang lumubog ang buwan ..." Matapos niyan, ang mga pag-usbong at paglitaw ng isang bagong lupain. Ngunit gaya ng persona at ni Dimalanta, nagmumunakala lamang ako. Sa kabilang banda, hindi ko rin nais mabunyag ang anumang lihim ng tula. Mawawalan na ito ng bisa lalo't binabali ang matulaing katangian. Hindi naman lahat ng lihim ay kailangang ibunyag, at may mga tulad nitong nararapat na lamang hayaang manahan sa mga distrito ng ating pagtataka. Naroroon kasi ang kagaanan, ang linamnam, ang bait, ang liwanag ng danas.

Kaya sa ehersisyong ito ng pagsasalin, ano nga ba ang maisasalin sa ating kabatiran hinggil sa "lihim ng tula?" Sa panahon ngayong pinagdududahan ang lahat, lalo na ang Kahulugan, na magulang ng Katotohanan, hindi natin dapat agad-agad na pinasasalamatan ang mga bulaang paham na may ebanghelyong wala nang kahulugan. Para na rin itong pagsasabing wala nang lihim, at lihim ng tula. Nang nabubuhay pa si Ma'am Ophie, kapapansinan siya ng masugid na pagbaling sa teorya, lalo na sa teorya ng mga Rusong pormalista—paborito niyang binabanggit at sinisipi halimbawa si Roman Jakobson. At may hinala ako noon, sa pagbabasa-basa sa maraming sulatin niya, na babad siya sa mga pananaw na teoretikong kinalululungan ng marami sa atin ngayon. Hindi ko ibig makipag-away, ngunit nahihiwagaan ako sa pagkaligta ng marami ngayong naniniwala sa isang uri ng panulaang walang pangungusap—na ang ibig kong sabihin ay parang walang konsepto ng pakikipagtalastasan at nahihirati lamang sa sari-sarili't sila-silang diskurso. Nakakaligta ang marami sa atin ngayon sa saligang katuturan ng tinig, na may pag-aabot ng kamay at pakikipagkapuwa sa isang tagapakinig. Sa espiritu ng pagiging pangungusap (o sentence) ng isang tula, ang mismong estruktura ng pahayag, na may simuno at panaguri (subject at predicate) ay pagkakapuwa ng kahulugang nakasandig sa dinamiko ng talastasang pambalana. Ang pangungusap ay hindi nagiging pangungusap kung hindi umiiral ang nagpapadala ng pahayag at ang tumatanggap. Si Jakobson na ang nag-iskema sa atin niyan. Gayundin ang paniwala ko hinggil sa tula, na sa ngayo'y may sentensiya (sentence din sa Ingles) ng kawalang-kahulugan dahil nagwakas na ang umano'y tiraniya ng kabuuan. Kaya masayang magsisigaw ngayon ng mabuhay ang pragmentos, ang dalumat higit sa anyo, ang aksidenteng matulaing danas, ang imprudensiya! Ang hindi natin alam, ang mga ito'y pawang mga pagaanyo lamang, mga konstruksiyon ng ating pos-estruktural na karanasang nagbibigay-daan sa hindi pa nating matiyak na pagbubukang-liwayway ng

masayang, masayang posmodernismo. Ang pandiwang gamitin ngayon ay pagbubura (erasure), at siyang-siya ang marami sa atin sa iba't ibang anyo ng panlilipol na ito. Sa nasang maging malaya at manikil ng mga kawalangkatakdaan (absolute), nagtitindig din ito ng isang opresibong ahensiya ng dunong na pumapaslang sa mga pagpapakahulugang maaari sana'y maging kasangkapang-bayan na makatutulong sa balana na maipaliwanag ang mga bagay-bagay hinggil sa sarili, paligid at sa buong daigdig. Muli, ang tugon ng persona, na tiyak namang si Dimalanta rin, "(s)apagkat hindi nagsasabi ang tula;/ Naglilihim ito." Nagkakaroon tayo ng nasang magpakahulugan dahil sanay tayo bilang kultura na tumuklas ng lihim. Ang mga lihim na iyan ay nakakintal sa kamalayang-bayang isinasalaysay ng ating mga bugtong at salawikain, halimbawa. Buhay na buhay sa tulang Dimalanta na ito ang mga katangiang masasabing tunay sa lupaing Filipino, sa ating arkipelahikong kamalayang likas na kalat-kalat tulad ng mga isla nito, at ulit-ulit na nagtatangkang buuin kahit sa haraya ang mapanghahawakang kabansaan. Bago pa man natin nakilala ang dulce et utile ni Horacio, may tamis na't saysay ang tula—at iyon nga ay ang pagtuklas sa anumang nakatatag nang nagsasamahiwaga, at muling pagbabalon sa karunungang pambansa. Batid kong hindi natin masasawata ang pagpasok ng maraming bagong ideaat maganda ang mga ito sa isang banda-ngunit kailangan din nating panatilihin ang anumang anyo ng kaakuhang tumitibok sa ating pag-aanyo. Sa aklat na *Love Woman* (1998) na kinatatagpuan ng tulang pinagninilayan natin ngayon, isinakatuparan ni Dimalanta ang katangi-tanging pagsasanib ng personal at makasaysayang salaysay ng isang tinig-babaeng nabubuhay sa mga pag-aanyong totoo pa rin naman sa ating panahon. Ang tinig na ito'y hindi nakaligta kailanman sa kabila ng kaniyang matalim na pagbaling sa daigdig, matalinong pagninilay, at bisyonaryong pagtalakay. Naisaloob ng tinig na ito ang saysay ng pangungusap bilang tula, at ng tula bilang pangungusap.

Sa huli, nais kong igiit na ang mabisang pagsasalin sa anumang akda ay mabisang pagbasa sa mga kahiwagaan ng mga ito. Hindi ko bibigyan ng tiyakang hubog ang aking konstruksiyon ng "mabisang pagbasa" dahil tayo naman lahat ay may sari-sariling kakayahang pampanitikan na kinakasangkapan tuwing nahaharap sa mga akdang pampanitikan. Nagsasalin ako ngayon hindi lamang upang ibunyag, kahit na papaano, ang lihim ng tulang ito ni Dimalanta, na baka karamihan sa atin dito'y baka hindi na nakaharap o nakilala. Nagsasalin ako sa pagtatangkang higit nating mauunawaan ang pagtula sa pamamagitan ng pagsasalin ng kaalamang lumilitaw sa gawaing ito ng muling pagtingin sa tula sa ibang wika. Hindi lamang tayo nagtuon ng pagbasa sa mekanismo nito, bagkus sa mga pahiwatig na siyang kinasangkapan ng makata para maisakataga ang kaniyang pananaw hinggil sa usapin ng paglikha at pagtula. Isinangkot ko si Ma'am Ophie sa pagkakataong ito hindi lamang dahil nasa UST tayo at kailangan nating isapuso ang kaniyang mga sulatin; makata siya ng mga birtud na kailangan nating maunawaan, mga birtud ng bait at kahusayan, at pagiging malapit sa mga lupalop ng kaniyang pangungusap, na atin din namang mga lupalop sa mula't mula. Isinasalin ko hindi lamang ang kaniyang mga pangungusap, kundi pati na rin ang kaniyang mga paniniwalang pansining na nagagabayan ng kamalayang pambayan. Ang problema kasi sa marami sa atin, nabuburang madalas sa ating malikhaing ekwasyon ang konteksto na kailanman sa palagay ko'y hindi tinalikuran ng ating pinakamamahal na makata. Sa huling bahagi ng tula, binibigyang-diin ng persona na "(k)aya ang tula'y maaari lamang maghayag/ O magtatwa, tulad ng pag-ibig." Palaging bumabalik si Dimalanta sa pag-ibig bilang pangunahing dahilan ng lahat, at sa kabila ng ating sari-saring paghahayag o pagtatatwa—sa sining man o sa kahulugan. Tatayain pa rin tayo sa kahuli-hulihan, sa lalim at lawak ng ating mga piniling pag-ibig. Ang sarap sanang magsisigaw na natagpuan ko na ang lihim ng tula, ngunit tumatalilis lamang ito, tulad ng maraming pananalig.

Ang Lihim ng Tula

Salin ko ng "What Poetry Does Not Say" ni Ophelia A. Dimalanta

Lahat ng sarikulay ng pinakatatago Pinakamahalaga pinakaiingatan Ay pinakabanal, madaling malabag, Kaya nga't talagang anong bilis Na nakatatalilis mula sa mapanlagom Na ministeryo ng tula: isang haplos, Isang palipad-hanging maririnig lamang Ng pandinig-malay, isang himig, Isang pook, sumpong ng gunita. Sapagkat hindi nagsasabi ang tula; Naglilihim ito. Ang magsabi Ay magpinid, magpigil, Ang di pagsasabi'y pagbubukas Sa di matiyak bagaman nananahan. Pag-iral ng hindi nagagagap, Na talagang ikinukubli dahil ang pag-ibig bilang puspos na kopita ay umaapaw at dahil doo'y tumatabang, talagang lumalabnaw para hanguhin pa sa mumunting patak ng mga salita. Ngunit, maaaring bumagting ito Ng marikit na himig, kung saan Napayayabong ng inililingid Ang ano mang bumubulag sa salita: Mga puwang sa pagitan ng mga tala, Liwanag na di napaparam sa langit

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Kahit malaon nang lumubog ang buwan, Mga sandali ng paghimpil, Paglalantad ng papabukad na bubot, Paglulubid ng mga pahiwatig Na umaahon sa pagkakabunyag. Sapagkat ang tula, tulad ng pag-ibig Ay nalilipol din ang lakas Sa aporia ng mapaglarong pagkatuliro Kapag narating ang kaganapan, Ang pusod ng kapayapaang Masidhi bago magsa-uliuli't Maging isang pangako: Itong Isa o itong Iba? Halik ng ligaya o kalabit ng kamatayan?, Ipinahihiwatig pa rin ang maaari. Kaya ang tula'y maaari lamang maghayag O magtatwa, tulad ng pag-ibig, May mga hinaing na tumatabing Sa anumang nasambit na, o hindi pa, Di maabot-sabi tulad ng papatiyad Na pagtakas ng bukang-liwayway... isang ngiti Na hindi guguhit sa mga labi.

drama

Sigbin

Chuckberry J. Pascual

Mga tauhan:

Bree	– 35 - 40 yrs old, real estate agent
Corinth	– 35 - 40 yrs old, call center agent

Sa sala at dining area ng isang one-bedroom apartment. May sofa sa gilid para sa mga bisita, at maliit na mesa. Sa gitna, may folding table, ilang monobloc chairs. May mga tsitsirya, mani, at yosi sa ibabaw ng mesa. Hindi makikita ang kuwarto, pintuan lang ito sa isang gilid.

Kumakain ng mani si Bree. Naghihintay. May maririnig na kaluskos mula sa loob ng kuwarto. Maririnig ito ni Bree, pero sadyang hindi papansinin. Pagkaraan ng ilang sandali, mawawala ang ingay. Tuloy lang siya sa pagkain ng mani.

Pagkaraan ng ilang sandali, may maririnig ulit na kaluskos. May sasama nang hybrid ng hingal na kahol ng aso at hagikgik ng hyena. Tatayo si Bree, sisilip sa bintana. Babalik sa mesa.

Bree: Nagpipilit maging kalmado. Parang nakikipag-usap sa bata. Sandali na lang. Konting tiis na lang.

Patuloy pa rin ang kaluskos at kahol/hagikgik. Mauubos ni Bree ang mani. Magbubukas siya ng isang tsitsirya, iyong maingay ang lalagyan at maingay ding kainin. Bree: *Mapupuno, sisigaw*. Sinabi nang sandali! Matuto ka namang maghintay! Napapagod din ako! *Babalik sa pagkain ng tsitsirya*.

Tatahimik ang paligid. Pero babalik ito pagkaraan ng ilang sandali. Titingnan nang masama ni Bree ang kuwarto. Titigil ulit ang ingay, pero babalik pagkaraan ng ilang segundo. Ilang beses na magkakaroon ng ganitong palitan, hanggang may kumatok sa pinto ng bahay. Maririnig ang boses ni CORINTH, "Bree! Tulong!"

Bago tumayo, titingin muna si Bree sa direksiyon ng kuwarto. Parang tingin ng nanay na nagpapagalit sa bata. Titigil ang kaluskos at kahol/hagikgik. Bubuksan niya ang pinto ng bahay/patutuluyin ang bisita.

Papasok si CORINTH, may bitbit na dalawang plastic bag, isang naglalaman ng mga tsitsirya, at isang naglalaman ng mga bote ng beer. Nabibigatan siya pagbuhat ng supot ng beer.

Bree:	Inis. Sa wakas!
Corinth:	Sorry, Bree. Iaabot kay Bree ang supot ng mga beer. Tulong
	naman.
Bree:	Aabutin ang supot, maglalakad pabalik na sa upuan. Maupo ka na. Start na tayo. Ilalapag ang supot ng beer sa mesa. Hihimasin ang sariling leeg, ilalabas ang mga pangil na parang bampira. Uhaw na ako.
Corinth:	Alam ko. Lagi naman tayong uhaw kapag Biyernes. <i>Titingala.</i> O, alkohol! Paano na lang ang buhay kung wala ka? <i>Tatawa.</i> Ang daming tao, grabe. <i>Ilalapag ang supot na hawak niya sa</i> <i>mesa. Uupo. Mapapansin ang mga supot ng tsitsirya na si Bree</i> <i>ang naghanda.</i> O, ano yan?
Bree:	Bumili na rin ako. Akala ko mang-i-indian ka, e.
Corinth:	Sabi ko naman sa iyo, ako na ang pulutan.
Bree:	Oo nga. Ikaw ang pulutan. <i>Tatahimik.</i>
Corinth:	Ha?
Bree:	Tao. Sabi mo kanina. <i>Ilalakas nang bahagya ang boses.</i> Maraming

tao sa labas?

Corinth:	Wala naman. Sa grocery 'yong maraming tao. <i>Mapapaisip.</i> Bakit?
Bree:	<i>Magbubukas ng iba pang mga tsitsirya.</i> Baka kasi magkakanta ka na naman diyan, kapag lasing ka na. Mabubulahaw na naman ang mga kapitbahay natin. <i>Titikim mula sa mga bagong bukas</i> <i>na tsitsirya.</i>
Corinth:	Sino, 'yong mga bagong lipat? Naku, kung sensitive sila, lumipat sila sa exclusive subdivision. Hindi 'yong dito sila sa Malabon uupa, tapos aastang parang taga-Loyola Grand Villas. Tseh. <i>Magbubukas ng beer, iinom</i> .
Bree:	A, ganon ba yon, Corinth? Ako ba, hindi mo binulahaw last week?
Corinth:	Kumakanta ka rin no'n, a.
Bree:	Second voice lang.
Corinth:	Second voice ka diyan. Sintunado ka kasi! <i>Iinom.</i>
Bree:	Well, hindi yon ang sinabi ni Alejandro. <i>Ngingiti</i> .

Hindi magsasalita si Corinth, titingnan lang niya si Bree. Iinom silang dalawa nang tahimik. Itataas ni Bree ang bote ng beer na hawak niya, akmang magtotoast. Titingnan niya si Corinth, naghihintay na mag-toast din ito. Titingin sa ibang direksiyon si Corinth.

Bree: *Nakataas pa rin ang bote ng beer sa ere.* Sige na. Para namang hindi natin ito ginagawa linggo-linggo.

Magpipigil sa simula pero ngingiti rin si Corinth. Itataas rin ang bote ng beer, iuumpog sa beer ni Bree.

Corinth:	Happy Friday! <i>linom</i> .
Bree:	Happy Friday the 13 th ! <i>Iinom</i> .
Corinth:	Huwag mo nang sabihin. Malas.
Bree:	Friday the 13 th nga, pero payday Friday naman. Patas lang.
Corinth:	Puwes, ang suweldo ko, hindi patas. Lintek na Australian

	account.
Bree:	Akala ko ba, gusto mo ng day shift?
Corinth:	Gusto ko naman. Parang schedule ng normal na tao ang schedule ko. Kaso mo, walang night diff.
Bree:	Hindi mo naman kasi pinaghihirapan yon.
Corinth:	Australian accent. Good day. How may I help you today? Oh? No worries, no worries. I'd be more than happy to assist you with your concern. Just a moment. <i>Balik sa ordinaryong boses.</i> Madali lang ba? Try mo, 90 times per hour. Tingnan ko kung hindi ka makapatay ng koala pagkatapos.
Bree:	Sabagay. Hindi lahat ng naghihirap, may napapala. I should know.
Corinth:	Australian accent. You bloody well know. Ordinaryong boses. Kumusta na ang paghahanap ng bagong tenants? Para sa landlord mo?
Bree:	Landlord natin. At huwag ka ngang umarte. May pangalan siya.
Corinth:	<i>Mangingiti.</i> O, sige. Kumusta ang paghahanap ng bagong tenants para kay Alejandro?
Bree:	May nag-reply na sa ad. Dalawa. Finorward ko na kay Alejandro ang mga number. Malamang, lilipat na ang mga 'yon this week. Dalawang units na lang ang hahanapan ko ng bagong tenants.
Corinth:	Kulang pa ba ang nakukuha mo sa real estate?
Bree:	Sapat naman. Iniisip ko na lang, extra income. Saka alam mo na, para sa kaibigan.
Corinth:	May narinig ako tungkol sa kaibigan mo.
Bree:	Ano?
Corinth:	Ang tindi. <i>Iinom ng beer</i> .
Bree:	Ano nga?
Corinth:	Ayoko na lang masyadong isipin. <i>Titigil.</i> Kasi una, alam ko, kaibigan mo. Saka minsan lang naman akong magkagusto nang ganito, Bree. Alam moʻyan. <i>Iinom ng beer.</i>
Bree:	Ows. Ang landi-landi mo, e.

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Corinth:	Ulol.
Bree:	Hindi ba ikaw ang may listahan ng mga lalaki? <i>Kakain ng tsitsirya</i> .
Corinth:	Siguro, hanggang mag-otsenta ako at mag-isa pa rin, isusumbat mo pa rin sa akin na nagkaroon ako ng dalawang ex minsan sa buhay ko.
Bree:	Oo nga. O, kumusta si ex number one? Si Gary? Akala ko ba, nakikipagbalikan?
Corinth:	<i>Bubuntong-hininga.</i> Ayon, sugarol pa rin. <i>Iinom ng beer.</i> Hayop na 'yon. Mas malaki ang suweldo sa akin, pero lagi akong inuutangan. Tapos ngayon, may text-text pang nalalaman. Ang kapal! Gusto ko ngang ipaalala na hiniwalayan ko siya dahil ninakaw niya 'yong relo ko.
Bree:	Yuck, magnanakaw! E 'yong isa pa, sino nga ba 'yon? 'Yong may kotse. <i>Iinom ng beer</i> .
Corinth:	Si Cyrus.
Bree:	Sa kuwento mo, mabait din 'yon. Guwapo pa.
Corinth:	'Yon namang isang 'yon, may kotse daw. Pero tuwing nagkikita kami, kundi nasa pagawaan, may humiram, o kaya naman color-coding. Ang bagal pang bumunot kapag bababa na kami ng taxi.
Bree:	Yuck, sinungaling na kuripot! The worst kind.
Corinth:	Pero itong si Alejandroiba.
Bree:	I know.
Corinth:	Kasotsk, tsk. Iiling-iling. Iinom ng beer.
Bree:	Exasperated. Itatanong ko ulit. Ano 'yong narinig mo?
Corinth:	Change topic na lang. <i>Iinom ng beer</i> .
Bree:	Sige na.
Corinth:	Wala.
Bree:	Corinth. Ano ba.
Corinth:	Nakakatakot. Hahalukipkip, parang kinikilabutan.
Bree:	<i>Tatahimik</i> . Ano ba 'yon?
Corinth:	Bree, alam ko, kaibigan mo siya.

Bree:	Kaibigan rin kita.
Corinth:	Bree.
Bree:	OK. Alam mo, nakita ko kahapon 'yong classmate ko no'ng Grade Two, 'yong anak ng tindera ng nilupak, 'yong minsang hinagad ng saksak ng siga sa barangay namin dahil hindi isinoli 'yong hiniram niyang betamax tape ng pelikula ni Kring-kring Gonzales—
Corinth:	Eto na. Sasabihin ko na.

Hindi sasagot si Bree. Iinom lang ng beer, titingnan si Corinth.

Corinth:	Bubuntong-hininga. Aswang daw si Alejandro.
Bree:	Halos maidura ang beer. Aswang?!
Corinth:	Oo.
Bree:	Aswang as in, aswang?
Corinth:	Oo nga.
Bree:	As in, may kapangyarihan na maging hayop?
Corinth:	Oo.
Bree:	As in, kumakain ng laman-loob ng tao?
Corinth:	Oo.
Bree:	As in, takot sa asin, takot sa agua bendita, takot sa krusipiho, 'yong hinahabol ng taumbayan para patayin?
Corinth:	Оо, оо, оо, оо.
Bree:	Hahalughugin ang mga tsitsirya sa mesa, magpa-panic. Bakit wala tayong Boy Bawang dito?
Corinth:	Hindi naman masarap yon.
Bree:	<i>Mapapaisip</i> . Sabagay. <i>Babalik sa pagkatakot</i> . As in, si Alejandro? Aswang si Alejandro?
Corinth:	Oo nga, Bree!
Bree:	OK. Aagawin ang beer ni Corinth. Alis ka na. Good night!
Corinth:	Kukunin ulit ang beer. Makinig ka muna sa akin.
Bree:	Ginagago mo ako, e.
Corinth:	Makinig ka muna. <i>Titigil.</i> Hindi mo ba naisip kung bakit ganito

	kayaman si Alejandro?
Bree:	Mag-iisip. Di ba siya ang may-ari ng buong building na to?
	Ilang units nga ulit meron dito? Twenty?
Corinth:	'Yon na nga. Mayaman siya dahil—
Bree:	Maraming-marami siyang apartments?
Corinth:	Bakit hindi siya nauubusan ng tenants?
Bree:	Prime spot ang location ng building pero mura ang renta?
Corinth:	<i>Titingin sa paligid, parang natatakot na may makarinig.</i> Dahil sa alaga niya. 'Yong alaga daw ni Alejandro ang nagdadala ng suwerte.
Bree:	Aaa. Ikaw, ha. <i>Mangingiti</i> . In fairness, parang malaki ang alaga ni Alejandro.
Corinth:	Anong parang? Malaki talaga.
Bree:	Nakita mo na ang alaga niya?
Corinth:	Ikaw ba, hindi pa?
Bree:	<i>May hinanakit.</i> Hindi pa.
Corinth:	Ikaw? Ikaw, hindi pa? Wow! Sa lahat naman ng tao? Ikaw pa?
Bree:	Sige, diin mo pa.
Corinth:	<i>Mag-iisip</i> . May point ka. Nakakulong naman kasi parati 'yong alaga niya.
Bree:	Pinakawalan ba niya sa harap mo?
Corinth:	Hindi. Ang narinig ko, sa gabi lang daw pinapakawalan.
Bree:	Gusto mo, abangan natin?
Corinth:	Ayoko nga! Kagatin pa ako no'n.
Bree:	<i>Tatawa.</i> Hindi nangangagat 'yon, gaga. Nanunuklaw.
Corinth:	Tanga! Aso, nanunuklaw? <i>Tatawa.</i>

Hindi agad makakasagot si Bree. Makikita sa mukha niya ang kaba. Sa pagpapatuloy ng usapan, mapapansin ang pagtingin-tingin niya sa direksiyon ng kuwarto.

Bree:	May tama ka na, no? <i>Kakain ng tsitsirya</i> .
Corinth:	Kaibigan mo rin ako, di ba?

Bree:	Kausap ang hangin. Lasing na nga siya.
Corinth:	Kaibigan mo rin ako, di ba?
Bree:	Exasperated. Oo naman.
Corinth:	Kung papipiliin ka, sino ang pipiliin mo? Ako o si Alejandro?
Bree:	Para kang tanga.
Corinth:	Sige na. Sino?
Bree:	<i>Mag-iisip</i> . Hindi ako tomboy.
Corinth:	Wala namang masama sa pagiging tomboy.
Bree:	Sinabi ko bang meron?
Corinth:	E sa pagiging aswang, may masama ba?
Bree:	Kapag inuulit-ulit mo ang isang bagay nagiging totoo.
Corinth:	Umamin ka na. Alam mong aswang si Alejandro.
Bree:	Akala ko ba, may gusto ka sa kaniya?
Corinth:	Oo nga.
Bree:	E ano 'yang inaaswang-aswang mo diyan?
Corinth:	Wala. Malas ako, e. Minsan na lang akong magkagusto nang ganito, sa aswang pa! <i>Tatayo si Corinth, maglilibot-libot sa sala. Mapapalapit sa pintuan ng kuwarto</i> . Malas talaga! <i>Maiiyak</i> .
Bree:	Hihilahin si Corinth palayo sa kuwarto, pabalik sa mesa. Buhay ka pa, di ba? Titigil, hahawakan si Corinth sa balikat, tititigan. Suwerte ka!
Corinth:	Sinong may sabi sa iyo? Patay na ako! Matagal na akong patay—
Bree:	May halong galit. —na patay na patay na patay kay Alejandro!
Corinth:	<i>Tatahimik</i> . Shet. Bakit kapag ikaw ang nagsasabi, parang ang sama-sama?

Hindi sasagot si Bree. Bibitiwan si Corinth, uupo ulit. Iinom ng beer.

Bree: Alam mo, naiintindihan naman kita, e. Sino ba naman kasi ang hindi magkakagusto kay Alejandro? *Maglilitanya sa hangin*. Galing sa mayamang pamilya, magaling sa negosyo—
Corinth: Pero hindi mayabang!

Bree:	—mabait sa bata, magalang sa matanda, gentleman sa babae—
Corinth:	Sa bakla rin!
Bree:	—moreno, balbon, ang laki ng braso—
Corinth:	Sexy ang bigote!
Bree:	—matigas ang hita, malaki ang paa, kaya malaki rin ang—

Titigil si Bree, magtitinginan sila ni Corinth, saka sabay na bubunghalit.

Bree at Corinth: Sapatos! Maghahagikgikan.

	1 8 8 8
Bree:	Lasing ka na talaga.
Corinth:	Hindi pa kasi ako naghahapunan. <i>Titigil. Magbi-beautiful eyes.</i>
	May sinabi na ba siya sa iyo?
Bree:	<i>Mag-aatubili bago magsalita.</i> Interesado talaga sa iyo.
Corinth:	Ngingiti, magdi-daydream. Ano kaya ang pakiramdam ng
	maging asawa ng aswang?
Bree:	Sa tingin mo, alam ko?
Corinth:	Hindi. Hindi ka naman aasawahin kahit ng aswang, e. <i>Tatawa</i> .
Bree:	Oo na. Pati sa mga aswang, hindi ako maganda. <i>Iinom</i> .
Corinth:	Ayon. Tinamaan ng drama.
Bree:	Bakit, ikaw lang ba ang may karapatang mag-moment? <i>Iinom</i> .
	Oo na, sugarol ang ex mo. Sinungaling ang ex mo. Puwes,
	Corinth. Sagutin mo ako: sino ba ang walang masamang
	karanasan sa pag-ibig, ha? Sino? Sino?
Corinth:	Alam ko naman 'yan, Bree. Lahat naman tayo—
Bree:	Ako! Ako lang ang walang masamang karanasan! Dahil wala pang nagmahal sa akin! Kahit isa! Lahat sila, tinulungan ko, lahat sila ibinigay ko ang buong mundo ko. Pero ang masakit don, ang pinakamasakit don, lahat sila, friniendzone lang ako!
	dony ung printikumuounde dony fumile sinu) immenuzione fung uno.

Hindi sasagot si Corinth. Iinom lang.

Bree: Alam mo ba 'yong feeling ng ma-friendzone? Para kang inimbita sa lunch pero hindi ka pinapakain! Para kang

	inimbitahan sa isang awards night, pero hindi ka papanalunin! Kahit anong ganda ng gown mo sa red carpet, kahit ikaw na lang mag-isa ang nominee, hindi mo pa rin makukuha ang award! Alam mo ba kung gaano kasakit 'yon, ha? Ikaw na lang ang nominee, pero hindi mo pa kayang talunin ang sarili mo! Ang sakit no'n! Sobra! Pakshet!
Corinth:	Bree.
Bree:	Bree mong mukha mo!
Corinth:	Huwag naman.
Bree:	Huwag mo akong pagmamalakihan! Dahil ako, kahit sugarol, kahit sinungaling, puwede na! Basta hindi ako kakaibiganin! Ayoko na ng friends! Gusto ko naman ng boyfriends! <i>Maiiyak</i> .
Corinth:	Boyfriends?
Bree:	I need to catch up!
Corinth:	Kahit aswang?
Bree:	Aswang as he loves me! <i>Iinom ng beer</i> .
Corinth:	Aha! Lasing ka na rin! Australian accent. Let's toast to that!

Magto-toast silang dalawa. Mauubos na ni Bree ang laman ng bote niya. Magbubukas siya ng bagong bote.

Corinth:	Kaya mo ngang magmahal ng aswang?
Bree:	Ganon ba talaga kadesperada ang tingin mo sa akin? O talagang
	ipinanganak ka lang na bastos?
Corinth:	E kasasabi mo lang? <i>Gagayahin si Bree</i> . Aswang as he loves me.
Bree:	Maganda lang kasing pakinggan, gaga.
Corinth:	Bree, seryoso. Aswang si Alejandro, di ba?
Bree:	Kung aswang siya, aswang rin ako.
Corinth:	Tindi mo ring dumepensa sa alaga mo, 'no?
Bree:	Akala ko ba si Alejandro ang may alaga?
Corinth:	Oo nga.
Bree:	Nakita mo na ba? Baka parang kotse ng ex mo 'yan, ha.
Corinth:	Pangit 'yong asong yon. Masyadong mahaba ang mga hita.

	Tuyot na tuyot ang mga balahibo. Namamaga ang nguso. May
	pangil pa yata akong nakita.
Bree:	Hindi ka lang sanay sa mga imported na aso. Hindi mo kilala 'yong breed.
Corinth:	Alam mo, ngayong binabalikan ko, hindi aso 'yon, e. Parang ano, ano nga bang hayop yon? <i>Mag-iisip nang ilang segundo</i> . <i>Australian accent</i> . Right! A bloody kangaroo, mate! A bloody kangaroo!
Bree:	Alam mo, kapag ipinagpatuloy mo pa yan, duduguin ka na talaga sa akin.
Corinth:	<i>Magkikibit-balikat.</i> 'Yon talaga ang nakita ko. Asong mukhang kangaroo. <i>Mag-iisip</i> Sandali. Parang mukha ring kambing? Saka sobrang baho. Amoy sunog na tae. Nakakasuka.
Bree:	Kanina, aso. Tapos naging kangaroo. Tapos naging kambing na amoy taeng sunog. Ano ba talaga?
Corinth:	Basta! Hindi ordinaryong aso 'yon. Sigurado ako.
Bree:	Mag-iisip nang ilang segundo. Mapapatingin sa direksiyon ng kuwarto. Matagal mo nang nakita yan, no?
Corinth:	Oo.
Bree:	<i>Mahina, mas kinakausap ang sarili.</i> Sabi ko na.
Corinth:	Paano mong nalaman?
Bree:	Hula ko lang. <i>Mapapatingin sa direksiyon ng kuwarto, inis.</i> Paano mong nakita?
Corinth:	Ni-report ko 'yong dingding sa unit ko. Natutuklap na kasi, parang nagkaroon na ng lungga. Baka 'kako pamahayan ng daga. Pumunta ako sa unit ni Alejandro. Pagbukas niya ng pinto, nakita ko, nando'n sa sala. <i>Titigil.</i> Nakakulong, pero 'yong kalahati ng kulungan, nasa may bandang likod ng sofa. No'ng nakita ni Alejandro na nakatingin ako, sa labas ako kinausap.
Bree:	Bakit di ka nagtanong?
Corinth:	Ano naman ang itatanong ko? Bakit mukhang kangaroo ni Satanas 'yang aso mong saksakan ng baho? <i>Titigil.</i> Saka pinaayos naman kaagad 'yong dingding ko. Kinalimutan ko na lang.

May maririnig na kaluskos sa kuwarto.

Corinth:	<i>Magugulat.</i> Narinig moʻyon?
Bree:	Sssshh. May mabait ako.
Corinth:	Ano?
Bree:	Mabait. A <i>arteng parang daga.</i>
Corinth:	Aaah, daga.
Bree:	Ssshhh!
Corinth:	E di patayin mo.
Bree:	Huwag mo na lang pansinin. <i>Haharap sa pinto ng kuwarto, parang bata ang kausap</i> . Mabait, sandali na lang, ha? Don't worry, marami kang makakain tonight. <i>Patutunugin ang mga lalagyan ng tsitsirya</i> .
Corinth:	Ano 'yon?
Bree:	Conversation.

Mawawala ang kaluskos.

Bree:	See?
Corinth:	<i>Iirap.</i> Traydor ang mga 'yan.
Bree:	<i>Iinom ng beer. Kukuha ng pakete ng mani, iaabot kay Corinth.</i> Kain ka muna. Para may laman 'yang bibig mo.

Tahimik silang magkukukot ng mani, iinom ng beer.

Corinth:	Mahina ang boses, parang sarili lang ang kausap. Hindi raw naghihirap ang mga aswang na may alagang sigbin.
Bree:	Alagang ano?
Corinth:	Sigbin. 'Yon daw ang tawag sa alaga ng aswang. Hindi rin daw nagugutom ang mga amo ng sigbin, dahil ang sigbin ang naghahanap ng pagkain para sa kanila.
Bree:	Wait. Namamalengke 'yong aso?
Corinth:	'Yong sigbin ang naghahanap ng biktima. Pinapatay niya, tapos

	dinadala sa amo niya.
Bree:	Aaa. Kaya pala nakakasulasok ang hangin sa unit ni Alejandro.
	May kangaroo na, may mga bangkay pa! Akala ko dati, paa niya
	lang 'yon.
Corinth:	Bree, aminin mo. Masyadong madalas ang pagpapalit ng mga kapitbahay natin. Matagal na 'yong isang buwan.
Bree:	Anong tawag mo sa akin?
Corinth:	Bakla?
Bree:	Ibig kong sabihin, ilang taon na ba akong umuupa rito?
Corinth:	Matagal ka nang umuupa. <i>Mag-iisip</i> . Upador?
Bree:	E ikaw? Hindi ba galing ka na sa ibang apartment?
Corinth:	Oo.
Bree:	Nagmamalinis ka pa, upa ka rin naman nang upa! Upadora!
Corinth:	Isipin mo. Nasaan na 'yong mga kapitbahay natin? May nakita
	ka bang umalis? Di ba, ang nakikita lang natin, 'yong mga nagmu-move in? Kahit isa, wala tayong nakitang nag-move
	out?
Bree:	Move in? Move out? Move on, Corinth! Kaya moʻyan!
Corinth:	Pupusta ako, itong mga kapitbahay natin ngayon, oo, itong mga kalilipat lang—
Bree:	Sino, 'yong mga nagreklamo sa pag-iingay mo?
Corinth:	Pustahan tayo, mawawala rin ang mga 'yan.
Bree:	Kung mawawala ang mga 'yan, dahil sa sobrang ingay mo kapag nalalasing ka.
Corinth:	Mawawala rin ang mga 'yan dahil kukunin rin sila ng sigbin.
Bree:	Corinth, ang mga hindi na makabayad ng renta, sa gabi naglilipat. Hindi na sila nagpapaalam kahit kanino, kasi nahihiya sila. At lalong hindi sila magpapaalam sa iyo, kasi hindi ka naman nila kilala.

May kakaluskos ulit sa kuwarto.

Magsasalita ulit na parang bata ang kausap. Sandali na lang,
mabait. Sandali na lang. Ang bait-bait n'yan, marunong 'yang
maghintay.

Corinth: Bakit ba pinapakisamahan moʻyang hayop naʻyan? *Sisigawan ang pintuan ng kuwarto*. Hoy, daga! Lumabas ka nga rito! Kapag hindi ka pa lumabas diyan, ipapakidnap kita sa pusakal!

May kakaluskos ulit. Galit, agresibo.

Corinth:	Aba, sumasagot! Sinabi nang lumabas ka na diyan! Lalapit sa
	kuwarto, akmang bubuksan ang pinto.
Bree:	<i>Magagalit. Tatayo, pipigilan si Corinth, pauupuin.</i> Tumigil ka nga! Hindi naman ikaw ang gagantihan! Maupo ka!
Corinth:	Susunod kay Bree. Natatakot ka sa daga?
Bree:	Ikaw ba ang ngangatngatin, ha? Damit mo ba, ha?
Corinth:	Bree, hayop 'yan. Walang isip 'yan.
Bree:	'Yon ang akala mo.
Corinth:	Patayin kaya natin? Mas close ka naman sa akin, di ba? Tulong tayo. Sige na. Bubuksan ko na 'yong pinto.
Bree:	Ikaw ang papatayin ko, e. Nagpipigil lang ako sa iyo kanina pa.
Corinth:	Talagang mas pinipili mo ang hayop na 'yan kesa sa akin?
Bree:	Bakit ba ang kulit mo? Kaya walang magpakasal sa iyo, e!
Corinth:	<i>Matitigilan. Mahina ang boses.</i> Kasama ka rin ba nila, Bree? Akala ko, kakampi kita.
Bree:	Hindi ko alam ang sinasabi mo.
Corinth:	Kaya nga hindi na ako umuuwi sa amin. Sumama na ang loob ko sa pamilya ko. Actually, kahit sa salita, sumama na rin ang loob ko. Pakinggan mo, "matandang dalaga." Objective naman siya. Pero parang may judgment pa rin. Matandang dalaga. Shet, di ba? Mas OK pa nga 'yong English, "spinster." At least 'yon, konti lang ang nakakaalam. Saka parang laging may ginagawa. Ikot siya nang ikot. Busy girl. E 'yong matandang dalaga? Parang nilalagay sa estante. Parang inaalikabok na poon. Putangina. <i>Titigil.</i> O, buti pa nga ang putangina, may

	kasama sa buhay. Puta nga, may anak naman. May mag-aalaga sa kaniya sa pagtanda niya. Magpuputa na lang din ako.
Bree:	Mahina ang boses. Hindi bagay sa iyo.
Corinth:	Pati nga 'tong pagtira ko sa apartment nang mag-isa, ayaw nila. Kaya kong buhayin ang sarili ko, Bree. Oo, hindi ko kailangan ng lalaki. Pero hindi naman ibig sabihin no'n, ayoko na ng lalaki. Ayoko namang alikabukin ang— <i>Titingin sa ibaba</i> .
Bree:	<i>Mapupuno, magtataas ng kamay para umawat</i> . Corinth! Please lang!

Tahimik silang pareho.

Bree:	Hindi ba, nakadalawang boyfriends ka naman? Siguro naman, nakatikim ka naman ng ano.
Corinth:	Ng ano?
Bree:	Ng love?
Corinth:	Sapat na ba 'yong pagtikim lang? Hindi naman nawawala ang gutom. Lumalabas lang 'yon ng katawan, tapos ayan na naman.
Bree:	Gutom ka ba ngayon?
Corinth:	Oo.
Bree:	Mapapatingin sa sariling katawan. Sorry, hindi kita matutulungan.
Corinth:	<i>Titingnan si Bree mula ulo hanggang paa.</i> Hindi ko ikamamatay. <i>Iinom ng beer.</i>
Bree:	Speak for yourself. Ikamamatay ko ang gutom!
Corinth:	Hindi ko ikamamatay kung walang lalaki. Kasi, lalaki ang papatay sa akin! Tingnan mo, kundi sugarol, sinungaling. Tapos ngayon, aswang! Ang galing-galing kong pumili. At ikaw! Ang galing-galing nating pumili! <i>Pipiliting mag-toast si</i> <i>Bree.</i> Toast naman diyan!
Bree:	Makikipag-toast. Mahina ang boses. Hindi ka tatanda, Corinth.
Corinth:	Ano?
Bree:	Hindi ka tatandang mag-isa. Kung 'yan ang ikinakatakot mo.
Corinth:	<i>Iinom ng beer</i> . Ikaw, Bree. Hindi ka ba natatakot?

May kakaluskos, pero mawawala rin agad. Maririnig nilang dalawa pero walang papansin.

Bree:	Saan?
Corinth:	Sa mga ginagawa mo.
Bree:	<i>Tititigan si Corinth.</i> Sanayan lang.

Hindi sasagot si Corinth. Iinom lang ng beer.

Bree:	Mahal ka niya.
Corinth:	Tatlong buwan na kaming mag-on.

Hindi sasagot si Bree.

Corinth: Sorry, sa akin mo pa nalaman.

Hindi sasagot si Bree.

Corinth:	Alam ko na lahat, Bree. 'Yong Amerikanong Jehovah's Witness? 'Yong hinampas mo ng tubo? Nakita ko 'yon. At 'yong iba pa. 'Yong mag-nanay. 'Yong bagong kasal. 'Yong matabang babae na pinaghihinalaan nating kabit.
Bree:	Tahimik. Bakit hindi ka nagsumbong sa pulis?
Corinth:	Noong una, inisip koʻyan. Pero nagkakilala na tayo noon. Nagkakuwentuhan. Nang lumipas ang isang buwan, hindi mo pa rin ako ginagalaw, at naging regular na ang inuman natin, naisip kong hindi mo ako kayang patayin. Na ayaw mo akong patayin. <i>Titigil</i> . Natuwa ako sa idea na yon, Bree. Saka sinabi ko rin sa sarili ko, kapag napagod na ako, ibibigay ko na lang ang sarili ko sa iyo. Papakiusapan kitang patayin ako.
Bree:	Tinutulungan ko lang si Alejandro.
Corinth:	Tinutulungan din naman kita, e. 'Yong mga kamag-anak ng mga pinatay mo, kapag pumupunta rito at naghahanap,

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nililigaw ko. Sinasabi ko, umalis nang hindi nagpapaalam ang kamag-anak nila. Tinutulungan kita, kasi kaibigan kita.

Hindi sasagot si Bree.

Kailangan mo nang itigil ito, Bree. Tama na.
Paano si Alejandro?
Kalimutan mo na siya.
<i>Mapapatingin sa direksiyon ng kuwarto.</i> Ah, tama. Dahil may bago nang tutulong sa kaniya, wala na akong kuwenta. Wala na akong silbi. At ikaw! Makakatikim ka na ulit. Ay, correction. Nakakatikim ka na pala ulit. Ano ba naman ang pagkakaibigan natin? Kung sa ikawawala naman ng gutom mo.
Hindi naman sa gano'n, Bree.
Hindi sa gano'n? E saan? Sa ganito? Napakarami ko nang pinatay para sa kaniya, tapos ganito? Akala n'yo ba, madaling kalimutan ang sangsang ng dugo? Ang mukha ng tao bago siya takasan ng buhay? Ilang taon na akong hindi nakakatulog nang matino dahil sa tuwing ipinipikit ko ang mga mata ko, napupuno ng bangkay ang kuwarto!
I'm sorry, Bree. Kaya nga gusto kong itigil mo na.
Paano si Alejandro?
Ako na ang bahala rito. Ayokong madamay ka pa.
Tatahimik. Ako na ba ang magmu-move out ngayong gabi?
Tutulungan kitang mag-empake.

Kusang bubukas ang pinto ng kuwarto. May lalabas na malaking daga. Dirediretso ito papunta kay Corinth. Mapapasigaw ang babae, pagbababatuhin niya ito ng kung ano-anong bagay na madadampot. Sa gitna ng pagwawala ni Corinth, sisigaw si Bree, "Sandali! Sandali lang! Ako na ang bahala!" Babalik ang daga sa loob ng kuwarto.

Corinth:	Ano 'yon?!
Bree:	Ano sa tingin mo, giraffe? Sinabi ko naman sa iyong may mabait ako!
Corinth:	Napipikon na ako sa dagang 'yan, e! Huhubarin ang isang sapatos at susugod sa kuwarto.

Pipigilan siya ni Bree, hihilahin at tatakpan ang bibig. Magtititigan sila. Matagal.

Dadapo ang pang-unawa kay Corinth. Mabibitiwan niya ang sapatos. Dahandahan siyang tatango. Aalisin ni Bree ang kamay sa bibig ni Corinth. Aabutan niya ng isang bote ng beer ang babae, pagkuwa'y dadampot din ng isa para sa sarili. Sesenyas si Bree kay Corinth na huwag gumawa ng kahit anong ingay.

Mula sa loob ng kuwarto, maririnig ang kaluskos at kahol ng aso/hagikgik ng hyena. Mas malakas na ito ngayon, mas agresibo.

Bree: Magsasalita na parang may kausap na bata. Sandali na lang. Titigil. Titingin kay Corinth. Tatayo, lalapit sa kuwarto. Sabi ko naman sa iyo, marami kang makakain ngayon, di ba? Sesenyas kay Corinth.

Sabay na papasok ng kuwarto sina Bree at Corinth.

Pagpasok nila sa loob, maririnig ang sigaw nilang dalawa, tunog ng mga boteng nababasag, gamit na tumitilampon, tahol ng asong galit, igik ng asong nasasaktan.

Pagkaraan ng ingay, may maririnig na naghihingalong mga boses.

Dilim.

The Contributors

Cyan Abad-Jugo has published two solo books, *Sweet Summer and Other Stories* (UP Press 2004), and *Leaf and Shadow*. She has also co-authored *Father and Daughter* (Anvil 1996), with her distinguished father, Gémino H Abad, and co-edited *Motherhood Statements* (2013) with Rica Bolipata-Santos. She has won a 2nd prize Palanca award for the short story, teaches at the Ateneo de Manila University and is completing her Ph.D. at the University of the Philippines.

Nikki Alfar says she has fought fire 7,000 feet in midair and killed a snake with a flip-flop. Confoundingly, but has found it much harder to earn a few Palanca awards, a couple of Bewildering Stories Mariner Awards, a Manila Critics' Circle National Book Award, and selection as one of twelve "Filipina Writers of Note" by the Ateneo Library of Women's Writings. Nevertheless, she perseveres, somehow getting fiction published nationally and internationally. She's a proud founding member of LitCritters writing group, was a fellow at the 51st UP National Writers' Workshop, and more often than not co-edits the annual anthology series *Philippine Speculative Fiction*.

Si **Mark Angeles** ay naging writer-in-residence sa International Writing Program ng University of Iowa, USA noong 2013. Nakapaglabas na siya ng mga koleksyon ng mga tula, maikling kuwento, at kuwentong pambata. Siya ay kolumnista ng *Pinoy Weekly*, literary editor ng bulatlat.com, at feature contributor sa GMA News Online.

Isabela Banzon was born in Manila, grew up in the university town of Los Baños in Laguna, and has lived in Quezon City since 1971. She has a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from UP, where she teaches creative writing and literature, has published two books of poetry, and read her poems in different countries including Indonesia, Singapore. and Spain.

Cirilo F. Bautista has recently been proclaimed National Artist for Literature. He is Professor Emeritus of Literature at De La Salle University, Manila. A poet, fictionist and critic, he has published 18 books of poetry, fiction, criticism and translation in English and Filipino for which he has won such awards as The Philippine Centennial Literary Prize, The Palanca Hall of Fame, Gawad Jose Corazon de Jesus, Gawad Gatpuno Villegas, Gawad Balagtas and Gawad Manuel L. Quezon. He has taught literary courses at the University of Santo Tomas, Saint Louis University, Ohio University, and Waseda University.

Si **Ernesto Villaluz Carandang II**, na kilala sa palayaw na Nonon, ay kasalukuyang nagtuturo sa De La Salle University ng Panitikan, Wika, Kultura, Malikhaing Pagsulat, Pamamahayagan at Humanidades. Lumaki sa bayan ng Valenzuela, may mga kamag-anak at mayamang alaala sa Nueva Ecija, Quezon at Batangas, at kasalukuyang naninirahan sa Bulacan. Nailathala ang kanyang mga aklat na *Angkan ni Eba* (UST Publishing House, 2005), *Lahi ni Adan* (UST Publishing House, 2007) at *Mga Kuwentong Lagalag* (NCCA Ubod Writers Series). Kasalukuyan siyang abala bilang Tagapangulo ng Departamento ng Filipino sa DLSU at Direktor sa kanyang korong Neo Nocturne para sa serye ng pagtatanghal sa loob at labas ng bansa.

Kat Del Rosario graduated with a B.A. in Literature from the UST Faculty of Arts and Letters in 2010. She is currently pursuing an M.A. in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Her stories have been published in magazines and journals, including *Likhaan: The Journal of Contemporary Philippine Literature*.

Rita B. Gadi, was born in Manila with roots in Kidapawan, Cotabato. She was educated by the Belgian nuns of St. Theresa's College in San Marcelino; by UST in Philosophy; by UP's Philippine Center for Advanced Studies in Anthropology and Islamic Studies; and by San Beda College in Law. She won her first Carlos Palanca Literary Award for her poetry at age 17; the 1998 National Centennial Poet Award for the Epic; and the 2010 New York City Poetry Award for "Songs of the Present." She has worked as Assistant Editor of F. Sionil Jose's Solidaridad Publications; Acting Mayor of Kidapawan, Cotabato; Information Officer of the Social Security System

and the Department of Labor; Policy Director of the Regional Autonomous Government in Sultan Kudarat; Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the UP Philippine Center for Advanced Studies; broadcast journalist for the office of the President of the Philippines; and Editor-in-Chief of the *Philippine Chronicle*.

Eugene Gloria earned his B.A. from San Francisco State University, his M.A. from Miami University of Ohio, and his M.F.A. from the University of Oregon. He is the author of three books of poems: *My Favorite Warlord* (Penguin, 2012), *Hoodlum Birds* (Penguin, 2006) and *Drivers at the Short-Time Motel* (Penguin, 2000). His honors and awards include a National Poetry Series selection, an Asian American Literary Award, a Fulbright Research Grant, a San Francisco Art Commission grant, a Poetry Society of America award, a Pushcart Prize, and the 2013 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. He was appointed the Arts & Sciences Distinguished Visiting Writer at Bowling Green State University for the 2013 spring semester. He teaches creative writing and English literature at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana.

Remé Grefalda recently retired as Philippine specialist and as curator of the Asian-American Pacific islander collection at the Asian Division of the Library of Congress. In 2012, she displayed the Library's complete Jose Rizal collection as part of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the National Hero. Remé is the founding editor of *Our Own Voice*, an online literary/ arts journal for Filipinos in the Diaspora.

Si **Eli Rueda Guieb III** ay pitong beses nang nagwagi sa Palanca para sa kanyang maikling kuwento, sanaysay at dulang pantelebisyon. Nagwagi rin ang kanyang mga katha sa Cultural Center of the Philippines at Gantimpalang Ani. Naipalabas na sa iba't ibang international film festival ang kanyang mga pelikulang experimental at dokumentaryong video. Ang kanyang mga diniriheng dulang panradyo ay nagkamit ng mga gawad buhat sa New York Festivals at Catholic Mass Media Awards. Nitong 2014 ay tumanggap siya ng Pambansang Gawad ni Balagtas para sa kathang Filipino mula sa Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas. Kasalukuyan siyang Editor-in-Chief ng *Social Science Diliman: A Philippine Journal* *of Society and Change*. Kasalukuyan niyang dinodokumento sa video at isinasalin sa Filipino ang *Dumaracol*, epiko ng mga Kalamianen Tagbanua sa hilagang Palawan. Nagtuturo siya sa Departamento ng Brodkast sa UP Diliman. Nagtapos siya ng Ph.D. sa Antropolohiya noong 2009 sa McGill University sa Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Dennis Haskell is the author of six collections of poetry, the most recent being *Acts of Defiance; New and Selected Poems* (Salt Publishing, Cambridge, UK) in December 2010, and 13 volumes of literary scholarship and criticism. His *All the Time in the World* won the Western Australian Premier's Prize for Poetry in 2007. Haskell was co-editor of the journal *Westerly* from 1985-2009 and is a Senior Honorary Research Fellow and Director of the Westerly Centre at The University of Western Australia. He was Chair of the Literature Board of the Australia Council for Arts from 2009-2011, and UWA awarded him an Honorary Doctorate of Letters in 2012. He is currently completing a new collection of poems, titled *Ahead of Us*, to be published by Freemantle Press. Haskell has served as Visiting Professor and Poet at universities in England, Germany, Italy, Singapore, Thailand, and the USA, and at the University of the Philippines.

Si **Chuckberry Pascual** ang awtor ng *Hindi Barbra ang Ngalan Ko* (2011) at *Sex* (Youth and Beauty Brigade, 2012), mga koleksiyon ng maikling kuwento. *Ang Kumpisal*, ang kanyang unang aklat mula sa isang tradisyonal na publisher, ay ililimbag ng UST Publishing House. Siya ay Resident Fellow ng UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies.

Waldo "Doy" Petralba is an M.A. Creative Writing student at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. He has a degree in Marketing Management from De La Salle University. He has written travel essays for the Mindanao Current. He was a fellow at the 4th UST Varsitarian-J. Elizalde Navarro National Workshop on Arts Criticism in 2012. He has worked as a barista, an account executive, a poultry grower, and most recently, as a teacher.

Si **Allan Popa** ay awtor ng sampung aklat ng mga tula kabilang na ang *Drone* (ADMU Press. 2013), *Laan* (DLSU Publishing House, 2013) at *Maaari:*

Mga Bago at Piling Tula (UP Press, 2004). Editor din siya ng antolohiyang *Latay sa Isipan: Mga Bagong Tulang Filipino* (UST Press, 2007). Nagwagi na siya ng *Philippines Free Press* Literary Award at Manila Critics Circle National Book Award for Poetry. Nagtapos siya ng M.F.A. in Writing sa Washington University in Saint Louis kung saan siya nagwagi ng Academy of American Poets Prize at Norma Lowry Memorial Prize. Kasalukuyan niyang kinukuha ang Ph.D. in Literature sa DLSU-Manila at nagtuturo ng panitikan at pagsulat sa ADMU.

Si Louie Jon A. Sanchez ay guro sa panitikan at pagsulat sa Department of English, ADMU. Tapos siya ng A.B. major in Journalism sa University of Santo Tomas at M.F.A. in Creative Writing, with high distinction, sa DLSU, Manila. Isa siyang premyadong makata at hawak niya ang karangalang magwagi ng Makata ng Taon sa Talaang Ginto nang tatlong ulit (2006, 2009, at 2011). May dalawa siyang aklat ng tula—ang *Kung Saan Sa Katawan* (UST Publishing House, 2013), finalist sa National Book Awards, at *At Sa Tahanan ng Alabok* (UST Publishing House, 2010). Katuwang na direktor siya ng Taunang Palihang Pampanulaan ng Linangan sa Imahen, Retorika, at Anyo (LIRA).

Tim Tomlinson is a co-founder of New York Writers Workshop, and coauthor of its popular textbook, *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing*. He is the fiction editor of the webzine *Ducts*. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Asia Writes, The New Poet, The New York Quarterly, Pank, Prick of the Spindle, Salt River Review,* and in the anthology *Long Island Noir* (Akashic Books). He was featured poet in Saxifrage Press (Dec 2011). "Blue Surge, with Prokoviev," in *Sea Stories* was nominated for Best of the Net 2011.

Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas, poet and fictionist, did her B.A. and M.A. in creative writing and Ph.D. in English literature at Siliman University. She administered the International Writing Program for nearly two decades, and taught writing and literature subjects at the University of Iowa. She has won the National Book Award and various Palanca Awards for poetry and fiction. Among her works: *Upon the Willows*, 1980 (stories); *Mountain Sacraments*, 1991 (poems); *Flying Over Kansas*, 1998 (essays); and *The Sea-Gypsies Stay* (personal anthology), 2000.

The Editors

Augusto Antonio Aguila received his Ph.D. in Literature from the UST Graduate School. He is currently the Executive Assistant of the Rector of UST, and a Resident Fellow of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies (UST CCWLS). He teaches literature, English, and film theory at the Faculty of Pharmacy, UST Faculty of Arts and Letters, and the UST Graduate School. His areas of interest include fiction writing, popular culture, music, postmodernism, and post-colonialism. His first book, *The Heart of Need and Other Stories* was published by the UST Publishing House in 2013.

Guro ng Panitikan, Malikhaing Pagsulat, Kulturang Popular, at Peryodismo sa Unibersidad ng Santo Tomas si **Joselito D. Delos Reyes**. Resident Fellow din siya ng UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. Kasapi siya ng LIRA, Museo Valenzuela Foundation, at Lucban Historical Society. May akda ng mga aklat na *iStatus Nation* (Visprint, Inc., 2014) at *Paubaya* (UST Publishing House, 2014). Bukod sa pagwawagi ng 2013 NCCA Writers Prize para sa maikling kuwento, siya rin ang itinanghal na 2013 Makata ng Taon ng Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino.