

# Sands & Coral 2023 ISSUE PAGSUBANG

SANDS & CORAL

PAGSUBANG

2023 ISSUE



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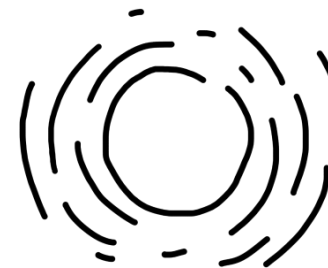
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*Sands & Coral*  
2023

PAGSUBANG



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## OPENING RANKS

The words you are about to encounter are the remnants of a catastrophe. From 2020 until 2022, the whole world was hit by a global pandemic. The suffering was real. The pain of those who lost was insurmountable. And yet, amidst it all, we emerged on the other side of 2023 to a new phase of life: the new normal. What was normal was new and what was new was normal. No matter what, we emerged from the ruins of the past as more informed scribes, through what we have witnessed.

In these pages, you'll find stories that are all brief pictures of the past. Whether true stories in the form of creative non-fiction, such as "Aftermath" and "New World, Same Old Us;" or poems providing snippets of truth, such as "Two Years Too Long" and "one-time insomniac;" or fiction narratives that play on truth and tale, such as "We are most alive when we are dying" and "The sun shines, the moon glows;"

the facade of the written world reflects the fate of the real — only in having survived the calamity can we be well enough to have written these harrowing tales.

Some of what you'll find here are the accounts of the aftermath, yet some are solidly within the new mode of normalization. For example, the "Naked Sonnets" are love poems within a shattering world. And, "Ode to Rain " focuses on the rain falling on corporeal bodies left behind. These moments of world-ending catastrophies are what brings us together onto this new phase of our lives. May you find the time to read and reflect on what has brought you here, to this moment in which you picked up this book, and read of the moments which we all have shared. As William Butler Yeats said in his poem "When We Are Old:" "...take down this book, / And slowly read, and dream of the soft look / Your eyes had once and of those shadows deep." This book is a testament to those shadows.

**Angela Gabrielle Fabunan**



# PAMALATIAN

# Ginapos

By Jovanie B. Garay

## I.

Ginapos akong mga tiil sa hangin  
Ang kaniadtong mga lakang nga di madupa  
Karon gisukod sa usa ka dangaw  
Way kusog sa pag-ipsot, way umoy sa paglabnot  
Aron mahimong gawasnon gikan sa usa ka kumkon nga kalibotan

## II.

Ginapos akong mga kamot sa hangin  
Ug nahisalaag sa dalan-dalan sa akong palad  
Ang kusog sa akong mga tudlo, maoy mihuyang kanako  
Maoy mikumot sa akong kasingkasing  
Maoy mohatod paingon sa akong lubnganan

## III.

Ginapos akong li-og sa hangin  
Way ginhawang makabadbad  
Sa kahugot sa hikot sa akong tutunlan  
Binhud ang lapa-lapa, punga ang gininhawa  
Samtang nagpaabot sa pagsubang sa Adlaw

# **Ticket to Reality**

By Marielle V. Godoy

While the Philippines sleeps in the gruesome sight of a relentless and exigent pandemic where existence is warfare, there is no unequivocal point at which bigotry leaves off. Altruism begins (especially when all of us are now walking at the sheer jaws of death). Thus, it is dithering to put one foot in front of the other, knowing that our foisted harrowing experience tells us that Covid-19 doesn't discriminate and is always persistent and vicious. Therefore, gaining as much of both as we want is not an easy task. I have learned that no one should have taken this lightly because standing on rotting refuse of physical and social neglect are the victims of Covid-19 who wrestles not only with a minuscule virus but with the horrors of discrimination from a society that has the ability to cast spells of light or to create darkness upon them. But isn't it ironic how in the event that discrimination does not appear to be relevant with Covid-19, and we each have a proportionately equal probability of becoming infected with the virus, is it not possible to protect ourselves from the disease? In a way that we don't need

to hurt other people by placing them in a position to be judged? A position that no one of us wanted in the first place.

Albeit the rife and the growing trend of a closed-off secluded world, isolation, and health protocols, it took me so long to get off the ground and fathom the intricacies of our situation. All along, I became blinded by the idea that this pandemic seemed set to recede, and just like the night, it will pass by with a new morning. However, sometimes, life will give you a sudden lurch that will knock your head against something so hard for you to see the grim reality. And in my case, nothing hit me harder than a mouthful gauge of an egregious experience- last year, our family went down in peril as we faced one of the most detrimental and gruesome battles of our lives; my mother tested positive for Covid-19, and the rest of our family were placed in a 14-day quarantine.

Indeed, it's been a year, but the urgent dispatch of memories still flickers right in front of my eyes, drawing me back to the days when everything seemed so dull and scary. Fortunately, I, tatay, and my two younger siblings tested negative for Covid-19 and were immediately brought back to our home for a two-week quarantine. But the fact that Covid-19 had taken our mother from us for 14 days to stay in a quarantine facility and had left us with the possibility of losing

her for a lifetime is like standing on the edge of a cliff. It was tough for us, especially for our father, who became an instant nanay. Every day, each phone call and text message we receive is a prick in the heart and a ticking time bomb.

The journey of the four of us is difficult, but it means nothing compared to the distress faced by our mother- who was left all by herself, excluded from the rest, alone, and sobbing silent secret cries in a room filled with fears and anxiety. Also, the imprecation of the disease doesn't leave her easily because even though many weeks had passed after she finished her quarantine, she still faced another extraneous battle, the discrimination of the people (this kind of attitude has long been overdue and persistent in Philippine society). Still, it didn't occur to me that after all the reflections and ruminations we did for the past months, we would go back to square one.

Evidently, we Filipinos are known for our distinct characteristics as a nation. We are the epitome of camaraderie, compassion, and resilience. But even though the Philippines has a reputation as one of the most "accepting" societies, it's still not as tolerant and accepting as it claims to be because it also places a greater emphasis on social standards and is susceptible to the same societal pressure and norms. Hence one day, when we woke up in a nightmare only to

find out it was real- discrimination became even more rampant. Moreover, social distancing, health protocols, and the screens that kept us apart are the leeway to our existence, and once you have gotten the virus, you will enter a whole new world of isolation and solitariness. You will do everything all by yourself, with no parents, children, lovers, relatives, or friends to attend to your needs and ease the pain. You will be left behind to face an uphill battle where survival is vague and wretched. And when you think that you're finally free from the quagmire intricacies of the virus, you will realize that you are far from the truth because once you step outside the quarantine facility or your home, the creaks of revulsion and discrimination from society will haunt you. Therefore, this battle doesn't make itself easier to solve, and we should not let other people face two battles at the same time.

If it weren't for my mother and her testimony as a Covid-19 survivor, I wouldn't be able to grasp the truth and reality faced by the Covid-19 victims and how they were wrongfully villainized by society. I just sincerely hope for a reciprocation of seriousness and passion for the words with which I have written. Where, instead of losing our resilience, camaraderie, and faith in this time of the pandemic, we leave apathy and indifference behind? Where we take

responsibility for our words and actions, maybe change and rectification would no longer be a fantasy but a reality.

# Towards the Oasis

By Ferdaus T. Tahir

A sandy wind irritates the lifelong desert nomad seeking the oasis, a misery? It is.  
Quenching the sorrow soul upon his many travels and met many faces, a misery?  
It is.

Deadly contagion continuously ravages the populace to its whim and so the Sultan  
decree To seek the remedy that ails mankind and subjugate the diseases, a misery?  
It is.

The corrupt vizier uses an unfortunate event to siphon the weak and weeping  
populace And so, a band of angry men gathered to topple the vizier to its knees, a  
misery? It is.

A worried man contemplates the future laid upon his fate towards the ruination of  
his own self Or dared to resist such ordained fate with the guidance of the God's  
graces, a misery? It is.

Reed flutes accompany a lone troubadour in his quest to alleviate the suffering of  
mankind Through the consent of the wind that dispels the atmosphere of despair in  
vices, a misery? It is.

A noble woman braves the uncertainty of the whims of contagion that took the life  
of her treasure. Choosing to champion accountability against the Sultan's graces, a  
misery? It is.

Oh, fellow traveler, on this lively bonfire, I, the Wanderer of love, sing the tales of  
survival Which instills hope and determination against the pandemic in crisis, a  
misery? It is.

# Buoyancy

By Zarelle Glen Dorothy A. Villanzana

The screen glares at me. My thumb taps on the side repetitively as if programmed. Every now and then, it presses down when finding an all too familiar face, either doing something new or perhaps with someone unknown.

Now I scroll downward. Harlet said in the caption of a reel, "I made a banger chorus." I double tap and comment in capital letters, "GIRLY, WHEN DOES YOUR EP COME OUT?" I've always known she would be writing music of her own one day. It was just yesterday when she would hold her ukulele during snack breaks, playing song covers in the room. I listened to her reel twice and continued scrolling downward.

Stella went out with friends two days ago. In a square with five slides, she poses in her pink sequined halter dress, outside Dunkin' Donuts, with a cup of iced choco in her hand. In the first photo, her lips are puckered; she smiles with her eyes closed in the second; the third is a photo of her with her right hand forming the peace sign, and the fourth is of her smiling with her eyes wide open, both her hands cupping her face. I would have almost commented, once more with enthusiasm, "ELLE WOODS??" but the last one was a group photo. Six of

them: Yeba, Lala, Harlet, Lilah, Kayla, and Stella—bunched up into a circle as the photo was taken with the front camera, the flash shining on Stella’s forehead, her arm outstretched. I continued scrolling downward.

“WAHH, I LOVE YOU! YOU’LL BE THE FIRST TO KNOW,” Harlet replied to my comment with heart emojis attached. I feel my lips expand to my cheeks. I tap the notification and look at her reply, untouched, pretending I haven’t seen it yet.

My response would have been “I miss you” in capital letters to keep the energy flowing, but it felt too personal to say. I liked her reply and stared at the filled-in heart for a while. I typed and retyped until I finally settled on the aggressive “I miss you” with excessive U’s and even more exclamation marks.

I continue to scroll down, passing by consecutive posts, each by Stella’s friend group, which had also been mine once before.

“I MISS U MORE,” she quickly responded. I smile, and I wonder if she meant it as I did or if she was merely reciprocating the energy, I gave her. There should be no doubt. We’ve practically grown up together since second grade. But it has been about three years since we last saw each other personally, and I am now in my senior year at another school.

Last year we decided we would meet in a coffee shop to catch up on the business of our lives. Lately, I’ve been disappearing on social media because I hated my internet presence. For a while, I thought I could stay above all the societal norms and expectations, but we all get dragged down eventually, I realized. This disappearance of mine caused everything to collapse.

Like that funny belief about staying above, I thought I could keep my friendships as long as I don’t treat them indifferently. I never did. In fact, with every opportunity, I comment, I react, I respond. But as distance played its part, time had me by the collar, and now I’m in a losing battle. The gap between the people I was regularly stuck around with and me is growing larger by the day, and none of the colloquialisms can make up for my long periods of lacking communication.

I guess sometimes we forget how to interact with close friends, especially when they become unrecognizable.

I cut my hair three times since May, and the last time I told the world about myself was in February. It is now October. It’s no surprise they must be asking who I am now. They’ve only ever seen fragments. Even the way I talk might no longer make sense. *Who is this person who types her messages with too*



*many emojis? How did she become so violent, crass, vile, and rowdy? When did she permit herself to start cursing? Why is she now so silent about social issues?*

“Girl,” I continued to scroll down my Instagram feed when a notification slid from above. It was Kacey. “I have a question,” I directly pressed the notification to reply.

“Hi.”

“Do...You...Want...To watch a movie with me?????” She typed in four separate messages.

Kacey had been my friend since second grade, similar to Harlet and Stella, and all of Stella’s friends in that fifth photo. Kacey and I separated schools in seventh grade, a year earlier than I did with the others. With Kacey, though, distance never mattered, and I never minded when our chat threads were dry for a month. Occasionally, we would forward links, funny photos, or informative news bites. Those were our proof of life.

The world was a flurry of everything happening all at once. With abrupt deaths and illnesses everywhere, it’s no surprise people change. With the change of times comes the inevitable change in direction. Perhaps not everyone follows

the same path as I’m headed, and sometimes, I forget connections should never be forced just to be kept alive.

“Yeah, sure,” I replied. “Tonight?”

I look at the three dots moving as she types, “Tonight.”

“Oki!”

## C Effect

By Zarelle Glen Dorothy A. Villanzana

Corona caused conflict,

confined consumers, called crisis

country to country.

Corona came coursing, creating bodies cold;

called courage to cousins, closed casket, cremation; condolence.

Corona cases counted, continues rising, citizens comedically cast calls to  
relocate; Oceanian countries closed borders carefully.

Corona converted colleagues; Christmas is colorful, compact, and costs  
less. Christians cannot convene in church, comfy lighting candles in the  
cradle, closely contemplating channels on television.

Corona came

crippled as

campaigns compile

crazy citizens;

compartmentalized opinions,

confidential conspiracies

crowd the city; clandestine convocations, crevices in coffins.

Corona cracked open; countrymen chuckle, their conjecture  
confirmed.

Corona is calm,

crime climbs in

crannies with cranky  
criminals—could  
come from cowardly  
chiefs, cold-hearted creatures. Companies carry on  
commerce, classes continue.  
Corona co-exists,  
cold countenance,  
coast cannot clear, a  
chill in humanity.

## Lawyering in the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Paul Ray G. Donaire

"For you, what is the new normal?" I asked. Within seconds, the participant responded with complete conviction, "*New normal is something abnormal to me.*"

To say the motion on the justice system has been overused is an understatement. It has undeniably been part of contemporary Philippine issues for a long time and will continue to be discussed unless otherwise resolved. However, let's set aside the justice system for the meantime and create a dialogue at the grassroots level. **How is lawyering in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

In the study, "Law in Disorder: Lawyering in the COVID-19 Pandemic," which I authored together with a Sociology Lecturer, it was found that lawyering, much like within the health sector or other workforces, has been dramatically disrupted with the emergence of the recent global health crisis. As an inherently in-person job that relies on people, lawyers are currently facing a few adjustments to cope with the new normal setup.

Take, for instance, the transition from physical to virtual hearings. This adjustment bears its advantages and disadvantages. While granted that it lessens the dread of hustling from one place to another, conducting case pleadings online imposes a threat to the law in disorder. Nowadays, lawyers — and even judges — find it hard to examine the witnesses' demeanors in a virtual setting because they are no longer near where security is tightly observed.

It is also worth mentioning how the infliction of coronavirus within court staff can result in cases being subject to postponement, which is likely to be rescheduled in the next few months or, worse, in the next year.

I pursued this study with the aim of filling the gap among our Filipino lawyers' narratives on societal issues, particularly in the recent global health crisis that started as a novelty. It is easy to say that lawyers are no exception to the impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the question goes as follows: is there any empirical data to support this claim? Hence, to some extent, social research provides an avenue for voicing out concerns affecting the masses.

During the Key Informant Interview (KII), the three participants suggested a policy recommendation to address the difficulty in the structure of lawyering during the pandemic that doesn't seem to be undertaken by the

authorities. This includes improving the virtual hearings; setting an effective schedule of hearings by the court; limiting the hearings per day; and ensuring the proper safety measures within the courts' premises.

This pandemic has forced lawyers to adjust and adapt to the new guidelines implemented by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-MEID), supported by the Supreme Court (SC) of the Philippines through its COVID-19 issuances. Despite the hurdles brought about by the pandemic, the study concluded that lawyers have been able to thrive in the new normal setup. One of the participants expressed that "*Lawyers must be adaptable.*"

In times of uncertainty, adaptability does go a long way. Given that lawyering is a form of social engineering that fuels through physical interactions, the effort in bringing the intention to manage an entirely "new normal" concept of service is just a means to an end, a way to ensure that everyone has equal access to our system of justice. Although the virtual mode hampers the essence of the attorney-client relationship, changes are likely to be made after the health intervention, as this is one way to control the pervasive transmission of the coronavirus.

This goes for all individuals from different walks of life. The social problems we are dealing with and about to face might be something that goes beyond our expectations, or the consequences brought about by the decision of the majority. So, to this end, let us help ourselves first before partaking in collective efforts and start instilling in our minds the concept of sociological imagination that would ultimately allow us to better understand the world, starting from the grassroots community to a broader structure of society, where we can connect personal troubles to public issues.

## **Two Years Too Long**

By Zarelle Glen Dorothy A. Villanzana

Contrary to societal expectations, I have regressed significantly.  
Eye contact with the walls is a struggle,  
it bends to the screen below.

The door is closed with disclosed information  
from a year ago: cases are rising--  
yet again. Blame the teenage kids strolling in the mall to live  
out their youth. Good for them,  
but maybe not when their actions begin  
to follow the order of consequence.

Was it worth it? We know what the majority thinks.  
What do I think? Good for them,  
but not when the chances of outliving  
the oldest lady alive get taken away  
when destiny has come this far for them to be taken  
away. Is it destiny or free will that will take them away?

I don't have the answers.

Let's ask God.

God, are you there? Asking that question now makes me think

You are.

"Only God should be the regular tenant in your head,"

my teacher said. "The others never pay rent but  
He does it through blessings."  
We've never felt entirely desolate despite the storms,  
but I see a family in the countryside  
with a pile of corpses, the young one's eyes  
wide, cursing the Heavens; even a father on the hospital  
bed and a call from a wife, with  
a pillow or a glove to disguise human touch for a final breath—  
have they not kept God long enough inside their head?

Contrary to the facade I uphold, I have quietly deteriorated.  
The state of being lowkey enabled me  
to pretend, being in another country, I am exhilarated; for a  
while, I was—the novelty of an extended vacation, and  
the novelty of a sudden migration are quite similar,  
I've observed. Constant is my behavior in which  
long durations cease to be exciting, and  
Ultimately, I will fall out of thrill for the mundane.  
A longing will surface to the conscious mind, to want  
the experience the youth have:  
a rebellious night, a flight of stairs to chase upon running away  
from authorities, or a simple meet and greet  
with friends because it has been two years since

the last time we had close contact. Some of them I am no longer in  
contact with because they have decided  
to keep their life entirely private, away from prying eyes on social  
media. I have grown to understand that  
social media is significant in the area of keeping connected, despite  
the fact it distorts our perceptions, perspectives  
are called to reason when it doesn't match with the majority.  
I have been in a quandary ever since the elections,  
I learned adults are only human that need correction from  
a younger person, and that  
Truth is not spelled with the capital letter 'T'.  
Two years have been too long,  
I feel like I have both progressed and retrogressed at the same  
duration; a deception I hold, but I was told  
growth is not merely one upward motion.

# A Life that Changes

By Ferdaus T. Tahir

A symphonic dance of the heavenly bodies ordained by the cosmos, such a sight  
to see! Rhythmically rotating on its own dominion towards the cosmos, such a  
sight to see!

A Sufi master meticulously weaves his disciple to strengthen his resolve to brave  
An annihilation of ego within the self which meant to disclose, such a sight to  
see!

A tearful breeze swept through the tired consciousness of the lamenting  
dwellers of the worldly life

Upon the cruelty of the contagion, but it did not make them lose, such a sight  
to see!

Man was imposed in isolation by the royal decree and is restless.  
Several years onward, the man is free! It lifts the decree to impose, such a sight  
to see!

I, the wanderer, bespoke the saga, oh people! To unravel the struggles of man  
Living in the ruins of the deadly contagion as it is now close, such a sight to see!

# **New World, Same Old Us**

By Dane Zelle Digal

Living through a historical event was probably not something on most Gen Z kids' bucket lists. I think almost everyone remembers the last days of school in 2020. Exams were either over or postponed. Everyone was concerned about the news of the upcoming pandemic and expected the lockdown to last a few weeks. Despite the cancellation of classes, everyone hoped that there would still be a chance for face-to-face recognition. Either way, we all bid our goodbyes that day, happy to receive a break from coming to school every day with the news of the COVID-19 lockdown. But then the promise of just a few weeks turned into months, turning into two whole years of a worldwide lockdown. God knows how much we went through in those two years, with so many hurdles and challenges crossed just within people's homes. People were wondering how to feed their families when the pandemic hindered anyone from going outside to do their jobs, and not everyone has the luxury of having an online job. Students and teachers alike struggled to transition to online classes and modular learning. It came to the point that many suffered from mental health problems because of



the heavy workload and new adjustments. Everyone tried their best to navigate this new world.

Learning during the pandemic was especially tough. I sometimes feel as if I barely learned anything academic during it, though on the contrary, I learned more about myself. It wasn't just me. Almost everyone I knew came out of it knowing more about themselves. A lot of them appeal to a distinct new look, some change their personality, and some realize their sexuality. Whatever it might be, we all came out of the pandemic with something, and I think that's one of the things about the pandemic that helps me hope for a better future. Even in the dark times, the pandemic brought; still, we carried something along with us as it is now starting to reach its end. Perhaps new lessons or new goals. I hope those who finally found themselves continue to find more and more pieces of themselves every day.

I was having a tough time with the big load of schoolwork piling up during the pandemic. When you finished one, teachers would give you another task, and so on. It was just exhausting to be doing so much work and staying in the same spot every day, and I knew I wasn't the only one who experienced that kind of feeling. Perhaps in the sense of camaraderie, it is somewhat comforting

to know everybody else out there I know was feeling the same way as I am and all were going through similar transformations. And now, another adjustment has to be made yet again as we transition back to the normal face-to-face setup.

I didn't exactly know how to feel when I started packing my things to leave home after being inside it for two years. Watching my room become half-empty after picking out what I wanted to bring with me to college was surreal. I had gotten so used to sitting in my room and dozing off in class that I realized how weird it would be to sit inside a classroom again and actually have to listen. Then I realized I would become even closer with my classmates. Seeing the campus packed with people was only a dream just before. But now it is back again, only this time, the new normal had everyone walking around in masks and carrying alcohol. It's crazy to think of how much the world has changed and that it might never be the same, yet everyone's now accepted it. But there was a small question at the back of my head: if the pandemic had never happened, would we still be who we are now? We have so much to rebuild, so much left yet to figure out now that our lives are slowly returning to what we considered normal back then. But two years of history is surprisingly long, and although a lot has changed about ourselves: perhaps the way we look, our personality, maybe even our

sexuality, sometimes I still feel like that 16-year-old at the start of the pandemic who didn't know much about the world. How difficult is it to rebuild when it feels like the world naturally chooses its course, while we still feel slightly stuck in 2019 when everything had felt so natural?

I started the pandemic by graduating from Junior High and ended it in my first year of college. Even though I acquired much knowledge during the pandemic, I still feel that I lack the maturity to earn the right to be here. I'm an adult, and some of my friends my age already have children, but I still consider myself a child. We all are still young. I hope that our new world develops along with us and that we finally catch up with its pace. The transformations don't even stop here. We may have a slightly different adolescence from the generations before us, but we will grow and learn all the same. Together, we can rebuild the world into its new identity. One that belongs to all of us, something we can share.

## **one-time insomniac**

By Isabel Q. Torres

today is October,  
the farthest day,  
the largest distance from that memory  
of learning how again to fall asleep  
without knowing. Of asking my hands to keep steady  
while I trace the outlines of a train with the butt of an eraser  
because the sleep therapist suggested "relaxing activities"  
and I could no longer write without self pity.  
When meditation turns to prayer  
and prayer turns to fear,  
every night  
is a rewriting of thoughts, a rearrangement of beliefs  
before the beetles come out.

PINITIK

# **We are most alive when we are dying**

By Pia Marie R. Villareal

People are scattered around the streets looking for face masks. The beeping of vehicles only adds to the growing mood of panic. The symptoms of hysteria are showing themselves in the rush of steps all around. Nighttime is only a hair's breadth away from embracing Dumaguete. In a few minutes the sun would fall far beneath the city's reach.

While beneath the Tree of Life and Death two silhouettes lie, arms akimbo, on the ground.

"Feliz, shake your body like you mean it!"

The green-haired boy turns his head to the sky, obscured by the leaves of this magnificent tree, a monument that serves as witness to more history than the life of him and his current companion combined. For a second Feliz wonders if through the years it has witnessed enough of everything else to wash out the memory of dead and broken men.

But when the moment passes, he doesn't falter in shaking his body with

exaggeration, arms on hips and all, passing thoughts flung far from the forefront of his mind. Feliz can feel the sweat starting to crawl its way down his body and normally he would care but today he relishes the hearty laughter his companion gives him, and he indulges on his own.

John Dee thinks he hasn't quite heard anything this sweet.

At 4:08 pm ABS-CBN News posted an article that the Philippines has confirmed its first case of the coronavirus. The first victim in the country is a foreign woman who is rushed to be under lock and care in a Manila hospital.

Within the next hour it was revealed that the woman had been to Dumaguete. The hour or two after that all the pharmacies from the downtown area to Robinsons sold out their surgical masks. Dumaguete was panic buying.

John Dee hasn't felt this high for a long time. It doesn't even compare to smoking a blunt. Everything seems brand new, from the rough texture of the acacia's trunk under his palm to the patches of sky showing from above its leaves. John Dee follows a branch with his eyes as it reaches up towards the heavens. They were under the heavens, John Dee muses.

"John, we look like idiots," Feliz says, shaking John Dee from his reverie with a visible quirk on his lips.

"We are idiots Feliz. That's why we're laughing, and the rest of the world isn't."

"You can't say that. People around the world are still laughing."

"If I don't see em then I don't believe in em. That's why I'm an atheist, Feliz."

John Dee makes sure to flash Feliz a wide grin. Feliz can't help but smile along. They are idiots, but at least they're happy idiots.

"It's pointless talking sense with you John."

"That's why we go well together, Feliz. You bring the sense and I bring the senseless."

The silhouettes on the ground lie still, close enough to become one, as the two boys grin at each other.

They are unable to look away.

The sun dips down into the city and within minutes the sky turns into different shades of soft sunset colors. People rush around to go home, carrying plastic bags filled with boxes of recently hoarded goods. News of the virus spread like one too, hopping from one group chat to another.

Even in places near Dumaguete, like Bayawan or Tanjay, face masks

were selling like the trending new thing whilst adults were grumbling about the officials they elected or the officials they didn't elect that got elected anyway.

While the sun was going home for the day like all the students and workers, the two boys underneath the big acacia tree opted to linger in each other's company, unhurried in having to face the reality outside of its shade.

"Doesn't Silliman usually still have a lot of people at this time?" Feliz asks John Dee.

John Dee shrugs in reply and goes about hopping on the tree roots above-ground, testing out his gravity farther apart from Feliz's atmosphere. Under these branches where dead men used to hang, the outside world had yet to touch them.

Feliz looks across the field wearily and doesn't notice John Dee taking notice of his distraction. A smirk graces John Dee's lips and he sneaks all the way to the spot Feliz occupies. Silhouettes almost one again.

A hint of worry worms its way into the heart of Feliz and he turns around to voice his concern to John Dee when-

"Boo!"

Feliz startles at John Dee's jump scare and stumbles back, catching his

foot on a tree trunk and giving gravity the perfect opportunity to pull him to the ground.

John Dee's laugh catches in his throat when Feliz thrusts a hand to grab at John Dee's shirt while gravity grasps desperately at Feliz's body. They both fall towards the Earth, hurtling through sundown like the sun itself during the apocalypse.

While the dark slowly embraces the city it also embraces the thoughts of the willing ignorant. Only a select few can see sense and prepare in their waiting instead of letting their paranoia take them to unfounded heights.

As panic burrows its way into the heart of Dumaguete, Feliz's heart flutters with something different.

The two boys were now on the ground, one on top of the other, both struck dumb with the proximity of their faces.

"I thought that out of the two of us you'd at least have better footing."

John Dee hasn't released a breath since realizing he fell onto Feliz. Feliz releases an awkward laugh.

John Dee finally releases a breathy laugh, and he laughs, and he laughs,

and he laughs.

"I guess we both just suck at balance, Feliz."

A whisper.

"That's alright."

John Dee's eyes linger on Feliz's smile. He thinks that he hasn't seen anything quite this sweet. He wonders if perhaps he won't taste anything quite as sweet either.

The ground swallows the sun whole and as the light dies out from the world, two boys under the Tree of Life and Death find a spark between each other's lips.

## Tugnaw

By Junelie Anthony Velonta

Tapdi ko haron makagakos ko nimo  
ug masaluhan nato ang atong kainit  
ilalom ining baga nga habol.  
Sa akong dughan, ipadagan imong ginhawa  
nga siyang muduslit ug mupabaga  
sa akong kasing-kasing, mamukaw  
sa tanang sensasyon ug emosyon  
nga akong tinaguan ug gipugngan:  
kainit, sa imong panit;  
kalipay, sa imong pagtapad;  
kahumot, sa imong buhok;  
kakapoy, sa inadlaw'ng pagkayod;  
kasakit, sa pamaol;  
kaguol, nga sa gabii lang tikaw magaksan;  
kahugot, sa imong gakos ug sa akong dughan;  
kasubo, nga kining gabhiuna mahuman.  
Sa dili pa mutulo ang akong luha,  
akong pugngan akong kasakit  
nuon hugtan ko pa samot akong pagpugong  
ug paggakos kanimo, hantod akong mabati  
ang mga bundo sa bukog,  
o di ba kaha panuhot, sa imong likod.  
Mupiyong ko nga nakahibalo  
nga sa atong pagmata, di na ta manginahanglan  
sa habol nga baga,  
kay imo kong gipainitan sa imong gakos  
ug gipukaw nimo ang akong kasing-kasing  
sa gahom sa imong gininhawaan.



# An Ode to Touching and Kissing (Gather, Gather)

By Jude Wilter Trinidad Domen

Beloved, we gather 'round for we shall witness  
Our return from those very peculiar of times  
Rejoice, my brother and sisters!  
Sing the sweetest song of jubilant rhyme.

From the discord, we approach a golden morning.  
Our hearts now changed.  
Let us leave this age of mourning,  
and bury all that was our rage.

Crestfallen were my brothers,  
now we shall drink the sweetest wine.  
Despaired were my sisters,  
now let us frolic upon the swinging vine.

O, how lovely this Earth, full of hope!  
The dark age has come and go  
Now we sing a song of new fire,  
reminiscing all that has passed.

The weight on our hearts lighter,  
as we have found our peace at last.

# Reconnaissance

By Raphael Luis J. Salise

I have decided to write again.

To open the memory box, to glue  
the pieces together again. To feel  
the breeze of thought  
                                  the warmth of touch  
  the depths of ink.

                  I begin with familiarity, the agony of  
revisiting. Who knew a name  
could hold so much  
weight.

The pen guides the grip of  
my hand, tracing its way back  
                                  home, through  
  stoplights  
                                  through intersections  
through the corners of this city,  
                  wide awake, but  
                                  seemingly dead  
  in your absence.

To write is to scratch the scabs  
                  these stories  
                                  on my skin  
waiting to bleed again.

Come, let me feel its sting.

# NAKED SONNET I

*for C.*

By Khail Campos Santia

you are  
moonrise  
and moonset  
on a new moon  
you are  
waves  
standing still  
and mountains  
dancing  
and if  
the blossoming  
of a rose  
has a sound  
you are that too

## NAKED SONNET II

By Khail Campos Santia

the sun crowns  
from its sea-womb  
a fisherman's bangka  
cuddles the horizon  
sun, boat, sun glitter align:  
the sun rises for us, langga  
from different seas  
it will set over  
a glass window  
its light  
a garish blanket  
wrapping  
our entwined  
selves

*Inspired by the language remixes of A. G. Fabunan*

## NAKED SONNET III

By Khail Campos Santia

I fall behind  
as we walk along Yap Lane  
enthralled by a scent  
that lights up the air  
like fireflies  
it's the ylang-ylang  
you turn to tell me  
wrapping your arm  
around my waist  
years after  
I walk under the same trees  
the air perfumed  
not so much by ylang-ylang  
as by you

# Pompeii

By Raphael Luis J. Salise

The sky refuses to hear our prayers. Clouds cover every inch of the canvas until we forget what morning looks like. Birds escape this city's captivity—off to warn the edges of the land, or to abandon us. We never hear from them again. When the acid starts drumming our roofs, people scatter in the streets, all while carrying the remnants of home in their arms.

My first request: Stay. We knew this was coming, but we didn't have anywhere else to go.

But here's what I remember: warm hands and cold feet, tugging the blanket from opposite ends. When you say you love this place you only remember this feeling: waking up by the cliff but never falling off. Now you believe me when I say that love is a column, and trust is ionic.

Second request: Say that you love me. Say it again and again until the words lose their meaning.

We bar the doors and shut the windows, caving ourselves in our fortress. It is much safer here. But soon enough the ashfall and pumice would trespass. Soon we will be etched in history.

For my final request: Hold me before the ceiling swallows us. And keep us safe when it does.

# A Saga of Love

By Ferdaus T. Tahir

A lover wails upon the separation of their beloved's light,  
do you hear? My beloved.  
A creeping shadow that haunts the weeping lover in the lonely night,  
do you hear? My beloved.

The devastation of the rampant curse befell the town that claimed many souls  
and cause suffering  
A hymn for their loved one signifying their once radiant light,  
do you hear? My beloved.

Through the eyes of a mystic, they unravel their very own self, the capability to  
shine  
Amidst embroiling malice enveloping the wild world they shone bright, do you  
hear? My beloved.

Arising from the ruination, the perseverance of women reinvigorates the  
populace  
To shun evil and rebuild their land with a lively music tonight,  
do you hear? My beloved

In a box tightly shut, a solitary man shuns any speck of the wind's grace in his  
dominion  
But a caring sage comforts him with her hand and instills him with delight, do  
you hear? My beloved.

A changing tide came, a turbulent wave that violently swept the foundation of  
the self

From love they cling and change to compensate for the breaking of themselves,  
do you hear? My beloved

Oh, my beloved, I relay to you my everlasting love for your radiant light and  
grace

As I, the wanderer of love, play with my reed flute in the twilight,  
do you hear? My beloved

## **An Ode to Your Intoxicating Scent**

By Jude Wilter Trinidad Domen

I would paint the world with your smile.  
That sweetest smile has given me brand new  
eyes. I was troubled and lonesome for a while  
Until you came in, a flush of promise.

You changed me from top to bottom,  
I'm a whole new better package.  
From my sorrowful eyes come the  
most hopeful of perspectives.

I'm drunk with the smell of you.  
The scent of irish springs gushing  
past our room as I lie awake (in the dark)  
I find myself blushing

I grow tipsy with the endless thought of you  
restless is my being seeking your laugh  
For you, I'd go past the curfew  
I'd follow your trail if it weren't too daft

A little sad boy was I until you came along,  
and then you taught me every night how to write songs

Merry was every moment with you,  
I had the time of my life.  
We'd talk all night just us two,  
until the dawn drags us to sleep.  
Yet long has passed since us two  
Your smile has never faded  
I'd still paint the world with your sweet hue  
If you'd ask anything, I'll still be persuaded.



I will never forget—

Wherever I go, as long as I remember  
I'll wear my sweetest smile for you  
I'll be as happy, mellow, and tender  
as when we were together.

## Homeward Bound

By Raphael Luis J. Salise

by the time we get to Mintal,

the storm is  
reduced to rain  
reduced to drizzle  
reduced to wind

we leave footprints on mud  
we soak our shoes in puddles

we carefully avoid landmines  
that reek of leftover pulutan,  
gin and beer and juice and

with your arm slung over my shoulder  
we trudge the midnight battlefield—  
the marshland of Bago Oshiro

we

grew up here,  
on this very

soil

we know every corner, every turn we have this map imprinted

on our skins

just a few more strides until we  
reach our base, we  
rest our aching feet, we

recover for tomorrow, you

hold on to me like how Mintal holds memories

and when we finally arrive,  
each street lamp we pass by  
celebrates, as if to say

*Welcome home.*

## **The sun shines; the moon glows**

By Charles Clement Bardoquillo

The sun peeked through the thunderclouds, sharing its beauty with those who look. The children danced along with the waves of the ocean enjoying the peak of their childhood. Grayson looked at them in envy. Their carefree nature and their relentless glee were something that has left him over the years. He could only think about the fact that time has passed him by, and he didn't even realize it. He shifted his focus back to the sunrise. He hoped that the sun's glow would help dissipate the cold weight that churned around him, but they remained. It's been years since they've settled just far enough that Grayson can't swat them away but near enough that their presence was encumbering.

The pinks and yellows slowly shifted into the colors it would stay in for the next eight hours or so and the spectacle ceased. The children were no longer there; they were replaced with older men who maybe had too much to drink the night before and needed a good swim to wash the hangover away. Grayson didn't even realize that time had passed. This was a common occurrence, so shock was no longer a part of the equation. Time just simply

came and went whenever it pleased and he was a victim who can't do anything about it.

His buttocks ached as he stood up from the number of benches that were scattered along the boulevard. People were starting to walk around and do their business and to them, a twenty-year-old boy sitting alone on a bench was not something worth pondering about. Grayson checked his phone to see if anybody looked for him while he was staring off into space only to see more messages from group chats of people having fun with their friends. Underneath the pain that washed along his veins was the gripping hold of envy. But he pushed that feeling deep down into his unconscious. He had no use for envy as of the moment because as he looked at the time that was etched on his phone, he could see that he only had five minutes before the start of his class.

Grayson didn't know when or how he got on his bike and started speeding past cars and motorcycles but he didn't care. All he cared about was that he was going to be late for his first day of class. His mind was focused on not getting hit by cars and making sure he stayed on the right side of the road and yet his ears wandered and the sound of people yelling teased his mind to look. With as much willpower he could muster he remained focused on the road as he

finally took a right turn towards Hibbard Avenue and there, he saw people and cars slowing down due to traffic. Rows of people on the sidewalk holding banners and cardboard filled with letters he couldn't read. They were loud and angry and-

*Embarrassing*, Grayson thought as he passed them by. He didn't really understand activists, he thought they were embarrassing and quite frankly a bit stand-offish. Whenever he saw protesters or activists out and about his skin would crawl and he would be embarrassed for them and of them.

As he weaved through the traffic, he noticed that there was one voice that overcame them all. There was the distinct crackle of a megaphone and the voice was yelling for an advocacy that Grayson couldn't properly hear. Eventually, he got close enough to the source of the voice and as he got near the entrance of Katada street he finally saw the owner. Grayson almost bumped the car in front of him had he not braked on time.

On the sidewalk was a guy about his age with his right fist raised in the air and the other holding a microphone near his mouth.

"This project was made only to serve the rich! We, the people of Dumaguete, oppose the reclamation of our shore! We, the people of

Dumaguete, should stand against the destruction of nature for the sake of greed! The Silliman Advocacy Committee opposes the reclamation project!"

His light brown hair was iridescent against the sunlight as he turned his face to the people behind him, "*Makibaka! Huwag matakot!*"

His voice held a strength that would stand even if he didn't have the megaphone in his grasp. Others followed suit and soon enough the whole avenue was filled with people screaming for justice, yet their voices were nowhere near as powerful as his. Something new developed in the pit of Grayson's stomach but he brushed it off as just him being uncomfortable with the fact that he is face to face with someone who held power. The thought made him sick.

Their eyes connected and the sun was his halo and the sweat on his cheeks were the pearls of the orient. The guy looked at him in confusion while Grayson felt as if the tires of his bike melded themselves with the asphalt.

A striking blast of sound exploded behind him and only then was he freed from his trance and realized that the road was already partially clear, and he was blocking the traffic. He took one last glance at the guy with the megaphone and the light brown hair, who had a small smile on his lips, the

sun casting a halo directly behind him. Warmth rushed through every inch of his skin and just as another blast of sound pounded his backside, he skeetered off and went inside the Katipunan Hall gate.

Grayson was unsure where the feeling of guilt came from. The previous warmth that waded through his skin was now replaced with an iciness that encroached deeper in him. He could just easily say that it was the extreme temperature change from being out in the heat to experiencing the freezing temperature that came with his Social Science class. But if he was being honest, he was unsure. The closest thing akin to it is guilt but he had to ask the question again. Where did the feeling of guilt come from?

His professor was just about to start his discussion when a prominent squeak from the door took everyone's attention. Before Grayson could even process anything his skin was set aflame once more and the icy teeth that gnawed at the edges of his lungs melted.

His gaze streamed through the class until they halted directly at Grayson. He smiled through his surgical mask but Grayson could still recall the polished marbles behind them.

"Sorry I'm late, sir. I was-"

“Out protesting. We know Elio,” the professor’s eye roll was betrayed by his affectionate smile, “Everybody within Dumaguete heard your voice.”

This only seemed to make him smile wider which made Grayson’s stomach twist once more.

“Take a seat, Elio.”

The knot inside Grayson’s stomach only grew tighter as Elio sneaked glances at him. Anxiety crept up his spine at the thought of Elio sitting beside him. He didn’t though. He sat far away, near the front.

Grayson didn’t see Elio for the next few days. And even if he did, he would avoid him like the plague. He didn’t understand but whenever he saw him bile would accumulate at the base of his tongue. He doesn’t fully understand why but whenever he tries to think of a reason the first that would pop up in his mind is the fact that he had the power to command people and rile them up to cause chaos. The thought of that made him sick as well which made it a good reason for his feelings.

It was just a bit past sunset; the sky was a deep blue with a smattering of pink and the chatter of students complaining about their college life filled

the air. The streetlights that littered the boulevard were still off. Grayson was once again alone. He sauntered along the bricked road, his sight set on the students just carelessly laughing away their problems. He knew he shouldn’t be staring, not only because staring at people in general was rude, but also because it hurt whenever he had to be reminded that he was in fact alone. For somebody who seeks relations with others he had difficulty creating said relations.

A group of elementary students rushed past him; their laughter punctuated the air. Grayson came to the boulevard to feel better and look at the pretty lights, but instead he felt even worse than he came. Not letting the thought fester, he continued with his walk and tried his best to ignore the students that went past him.

His stomach eventually started barking at him to eat which led him towards the food stalls to eat Tempura. But as he neared the closest stall he paused and the barking in his stomach was replaced with the unfamiliar yet familiar sensation once more.

There in the nearest stall was Elio eating alone with a smile on his face, his mask carelessly splayed on the table. Even without the sun behind him he still glowed a dark shade of gold. He seemed content being alone with

his food and once again Grayson was envious.

Just as he was about to turn his back and leave, a younger woman with a card in hand approached Elio. Even when he was busy eating, he still welcomed the young lady with a smile. This left Grayson a bit miffed. With wide eyes, Elio procured a fifty-peso bill from his bag and gave it to the young lady who then walked off with a smile on her face. Elio watched her walk away only for his gaze to settle at Grayson. At the sight of Elio's smile, Grayson felt the familiar heat singe his innards. Just before he could pretend that he didn't see him, Elio immediately waved at him and made a gesture for him to come closer.

Grayson remained rooted. Elio's wave stilled; his hand stuck in the air. His smile slowly left his lips, and his arm was retreating as well. Instead of the familiar heat that ravaged Grayson's insides it was immediately replaced with shame. All because he was the reason why for a moment Elio's glow dulled. He didn't know what forces beyond his understanding prompted him to move forward and accept Elio's invitation but Grayson thanked them because the moment his foot took a step forward Elio's glow intensified. It was almost blinding how sharp Elio was. There was something about him that caused

Grayson to gravitate towards him. *As if he were the sun itself*, Grayson thought.

"Hello, stranger," his smile was playful and child-like. Grayson only stood there awkwardly, unsure if he should sit down.

"Hello, Elio."

His face lit up even more if that was even possible, "You know my name!" His smile was infectious, and Grayson had to stop himself from smiling lest he be perceived as a fool. Elio clapped his hands together, "Where are my manners! Please sit down!" Grayson obliged.

"How do you want me to call you?" he prompted.

Grayson's tongue was made out of lead, "Grayson is fine, Elio. Thank you." Elio let out the most adorable laugh ever known to humankind, "You don't have to be so formal, Grayson. I'm not anyone significant."

A thought formed in Grayson's mind, but he pushed it deep down. He only nodded. "*Ate*, five pieces of tempura, please!" Grayson noticed that without the crackle of the megaphone Elio's voice is actually quite melodious and boyish. It was warm and inviting yet it still held the power that commanded your attention. And Grayson truly was commanded. Suddenly

feeling a bit shy, he blurted out, "You don't have to!"

The warm smile revisited Elio's face, and bile lurched up Grayson's throat, "But, I want to." Grayson's heart was pierced by an arrow. His emotions were in a disarray. "Plus," Elio started, "I want to be friends."

The tempura arrived; steam wafted through the salty air. The knot in Grayson's stomach placated and hunger barked once more.

"And how else can you make friends unless you eat together?"

Elio smiled. And perhaps Grayson smiled too.

Laughter once again punctuated the air, but this time it finally came from Grayson himself. Never in his college life did he imagine that he would finally have the chance to share a laugh with another person. It was euphoric and it was addictive, the way happiness soared through his veins. Elio truly was the sun. In everything he did he shined and those who surrounded him basked in his glory and they too eventually shone.

They were now side by side on a bench that faced the east. It had a good view of the figures that would eventually light up and a good view of the sea. Just on the edge of the horizon, the moon started to take a peek.

"You know, I love watching the moon."

Grayson looked at Elio, "Really? Why?"

Elio's gaze remained at the moon, "There's something so magnetic about it. No matter how many times I stare at it I just marvel at how beautiful it looks." He placed his arms behind the bench, "There's just something so majestic about how the moon works in phases. Sometimes it's shy, sometimes it's confident, and I can't really explain it but it's kind of cute." His face pointed at the moon, yet his eyes lingered on Grayson.

Grayson averted his eyes, "I like staring at the sun," he flushed, "Of course not directly I meant like--"

Elio laughed and Grayson couldn't help but laugh too.

"What I meant to say was I like staring at sunrises."

"Not sunsets?"

"No, only sunrises."

Elio now faced him, "Interesting, why is that?"

Now it was Grayson's turn to put his arms behind the bench, "I appreciate the quiet that comes with sunrises. Nobody to annoy me with loud noises and watching the sunrise just feels so personal."

"I'm sorry for being annoying, I guess."

“Shut up.”

Elio laughed once again.

He sure likes laughing, doesn't he? Grayson thought.

“No, but seriously,” Elio said, “I find it so interesting that you like sunsets cause my last name is Adlawan.”

This piqued Grayson's interest, “Is that why you shine so bright?”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing.”

For a few seconds there was only silence. Both looked at the moon. It was nice and comfortable to just bask in each other's presence. This was something Grayson has always craved, and he was happy that he finally got to experience it.

“My last name is *Bulan*.”

Elio snapped his neck so quickly towards Grayson that it concerned him. Elio's smile once again made an appearance. “For real?”

“Yup.”

“Is that why you keep shifting from shy to confident and back?”

“Shut up.”

A small giggle, and then comfortable silence once more. The knot in Grayson's stomach was starting to unwind but he finally had an idea why it existed in the first place. He was content and happy, and he felt things he only once read in books or saw in movies. He liked being with Elio.

“I have one question, though.”

“What is it?” Elio asked.

“Why do you protest?”

Something shifted in Elio's attitude, the smile was no longer there,

“Let's just say I was not happy with how the pandemic was handled.”

“Explain, please.”

“I hated how the government was so irresponsible, and I hated how so many lives were needlessly taken. There were so many times where I wanted to speak out, but I couldn't” A pause.

“I hated how I felt so weak and helpless. People were suffering and the government wasn't doing anything to ease the pain. That's why I promised to myself that the moment I had the chance to speak out I would. And now here I am, acting as the chairperson of AdvoCom.”

“You're the chairperson of AdvoCom?”



"Yeah," he giggled.

Silence.

"I believe that whenever we have the chance to speak up about the injustices of this world, we should take it. Not everybody has the voice or the courage to do so which is why it is important for those who do have a voice to speak up," he looked at Grayson with his warm smile, "Don't you think so?"

All at once the streetlights and the statues lit up their orange hue.

And something lit up inside Grayson as well.

"I'll think about it."

"You should."

Grayson has never really been the type to speak against the government simply because he never really thought he needed to. A part of him is scared to speak up because deep down he knew what the government was capable of, and he was comfortable for the meantime. But perhaps Elio was right. He still wasn't a hundred percent on being a full-on activist and go on protest, but just as Elio said, the moon had its times of confidence too. And maybe now is the time to be so.

"I'm going to be honest," Elio said.

Grayson looked at him, the remains of a smile still on his lips, "What is it?" "I thought it was cute how you caused a traffic jam just because you couldn't take your eyes off of me."

Grayson's reflexes kicked in and Elio was immediately on the ground. "Elio I'm so sorry! Oh my God, are you okay?"

His arms were propped behind him, "What the fuck, Grayson." Even as he cursed at him, he still looked at Grayson with his warm smile. And Grayson smiled with him.

PAGLAOM

# Hilaki ang Kaugmaon Dili Muabot

By Junelie Anthony Velonta

ug hinumdumi ang kaparat sa imong luha.  
Ginhawa og lalom sa imong pagbakho  
nga sa paghanggap nimo sa hangin,  
matilawan nimo ang tanang kapait gagikan  
sa imong palibot ug sa imong sulod.  
Simhuta ang daot nga gilantad, hugaw  
ug nanimaho apan wala gihipos.  
Kitaa ug atubanga ang kamatayon  
sa imong damgo, sa imong pagkugi,  
sa imong gugma'g pagmahal,  
ug kini itiyabaw kauban  
sa imong kaguol, kalagot, ug kayugot.  
Ang tanan ipasurop sa imong kasingkasing ug  
mao'y himuang tuboran sa imong gahom.  
Ikaw ang bagyong muguba sa tanang gabok!  
Ang imong mga luha ang ulan,  
ug ang hanging mukastigo ang imong kalagot!  
Baha-i ang kadaot nga dapat unta anuron,  
ug bundaki'g kilat ang sungay'ng gatubo!  
Apan, sa paghurot sa imong luha  
ug sa paghinay sa imong kalagot,  
ang kaparat sa imong luha himoang abuno,  
Ug ang imong kalagot himoang kainit;  
ang nanimahong daot himoang yuta,  
ug ang kapait sa imong ginhawa himoang binhi.  
Human sa imong pagguba, pagpatubo.  
Human sa imong pagbaha, pagpatukod.  
Human sa kapildihon, katulog,  
ug sa imong pagmata, atubanga ang kaugmaong  
ikaw mismo ang gahimo.

# Every Morning

By F. Jordan Carnice

An invisible tailor,  
this old night that  
sometimes sews  
our dreams for us,  
measures how far  
we've come, finds  
the perfect button,  
the snug fit and stretch,  
the right thread color,  
and snips loose ends  
when no one is looking.  
Tomorrow, we wear  
new sets of clothes  
without a hint.

# Inertia

By Maria Mirjana M. Calunod

I wanted the wind to look after me—which is quite odd, of course, with an onset of a zillion micro-molecules that interchangeably collide and not in our so-called empty space. I used to term them graphical wires. *Graphic* because mathematically, it represents a value, which in turn, gives meaning to the concept of having to exist despite being synonymous with nothingness. It's nothing more or less really, than being out in the dark with your back against the grass, legs up on a cement wall, and a doggo whose shadow remains a perfect distraction against the moonlight, thank you very much.

He was the color of the night, and I called him strong. Not that I named him after all when my dad tied his collar with a rope to my wrist I cannot unlash.

"You're literally one of a kind," I told him firstly with my arms crossed, shoulder leaning against the unpainted post—and if I hadn't caught him guilty with stolen crackers in his disgustingly saliva-dripping mouth, I never would've called him otherwise. An outlaw, despite being trained.

The breeze wasn't warm, not cold either, and for a moment it was all

that I had. But I didn't have a picture-perfect memory lane or a handful of strawberries to substitute the childhood days I kept losing. These silhouettes under an empty sky that deflect no movement, nor was it his or mine, were just enough to keep me awake.

Newton called it his first law which everybody must've known, nonetheless. For "every object remains in rest or in uniform motion in a straight line unless compelled to change its state by an external force." Shadows, in turn, that we often patronize to feel like something else other than the object that's blocking the way of light, should stay as it is unless it's delusional. *Inertia* as the more common term.

Don't you ever wonder if so? At least. This life that begets another, and another, and the countless probabilities of a minute change in every event other than the usual clichés of sunrises and sunsets some people start to dread.

With these fading steps of little paws against the ground, I was left believing that one had always just been a reverberation of a moment seconds away before it leaves. Not an echo of these thoughts don't I find imaginary over things that rationalize the concept of giving back what someone else threw. Thrown

sticks as metaphors for kindness or predicaments of unrequited things.

"Little buddy," I said. Because everybody else calls him by his name. "I wonder how many times will you pick up everything that's been left devoid under these dead stars."

I peek above, through my shoes and the laces that fall by my ankles. "Why do you still choose to do so every single time?"

And I know not how he tends to lay his head onto my sweater stomach, still gasping heavily of air with a stick in between the tips of his sharp-edged teeth—I thought of how they'll always think of you. No matter how insecure of an owner you are, of parks and playgrounds you refused to take him to because the mountains and the seashores sounded like they were enough to make him feel at home. Or this rope you tie and untie in the breeze that takes your breath places you couldn't go. A part of you is still destined to reach the sky. Something you once owned, unknowingly, could go back to you in just a matter of the wind's direction.

I don't think, for one thing, or another, that this air that gushes in a multitudinous flow will somehow restrict you from keeping pace with the stars, and you, who is physically grasped stationary, are restrained from being at two

places all the same. Maybe you can be in somebody else's different time frames yet still belong to your own sense of tense.

And I know I'm no Nicholas Sparks or Danielle Steel, Dan Brown, or Shakespeare, but they might've never fallen deep enough with their chin constantly raised high, gasping for air. At times, I do feel upside down and my head cannot fathom everything without comprehending stories in reverse.

"The moon is never bigger than the spaces between your feet," I said instead, with my palm caressing the top of his head, his eyes drowsy under the moonlight. And in that split second did I think he was the only one who ever understood this kind of humane ache.

## Hbd

By Bereka Praise A. Amoroso

i.

Everyone starts somewhere.  
At a certain point in life, time is new.  
Happens *to* most of us.

Breathe of fresh air, can you smell the scent  
*Three* plates of rice on the table,  
of innocence?  
*Forgotten* memories that feel made up,  
never enough to keep the truth hidden  
*Fifth* stage is acceptance, but I still deny  
I think that's why I feel complete on *fridays*,  
cause I feel the most free

Isn't that what everyone's been telling me?  
To look up and know that I have to believe  
It's exhausting keeping things to myself,  
want to give it a rest  
Like He did on the *seventh* day after creating  
a beautiful mess.

I try to enjoy what's there instead of looking  
around for things that aren't  
Just like the sundae-dipped fry that I *ate*, for  
a while it felt I was on the edge of greatness  
Feeling comfortable in bed like a feline  
Thinking 'hey, I still got *nine* lives to spare.'

ii.

So there goes the school bell, telling me to

listen *attentively*,  
But my mind has someplace else to be.  
It's *eleven* minutes past, I have to be in  
the next class  
Wandering *mindlessly*  
Clock strikes *twelve*  
It's dark outside and the day has fallen  
into a *state of grace* with the sound of music  
and crickets, keeping me company.

Just like that *fourteen* hours have passed  
Your words are stuck on a loop  
and everytime I think of it, it always feels  
new  
Knife on the flesh of a freshly cut wound.

I lost count after *fifteen*, that's more than the  
number of times I keep seeing the figure of  
your name  
If I held on a little longer I might've gone  
insane.

iii.  
I think the last time I was truly happy was in  
*twenty-sixteen*  
The times I spent holding on to  
my dreams.  
Even back then, I detached myself from reality.

Before I know it, it's the *seventeenth* day  
The only thing smiling is my stomach today  
Other than that, nothing has ever changed  
I still feel the same.

*Eighteen* years around the sun

Yet it feels like I've only just begun  
to step foot on earth  
Trying to live and find my worth.

Birthdays come and go  
Like clockwork, a mirage of events show.  
Time in the palm of my hands,  
carefully keeping it in place.  
I sit and wait  
At my own pace.



# Whispers of the Waves

By Job I. Paculba

*"The sea incessantly batters the fine golden sands of the beach, beating its very soul. With every touch, the winds whisper the tales of the seeds it carries to the restless waves and the grains of time. Under the moonlight, this natural violence becomes serene, filling all witnesses with hope."*

*At least, that's what my mother used to tell me. I rub my hands as the cold November night drapes on my fingers. But now, she's gone, taken away by a sickness that ruptured the world. Now it's just me, myself, and I. But it's time for me to say goodbye too.*

I slowly walk towards the raging ocean—undeterred by its violence. Suddenly, I hear a loud splash from a distance. I turn to my surroundings—finding no one except the beach bathed by full moonlight. I made a beeline to the source of the sound; the wind was not enough to deter my sensitive hearing.

"Who's there?" I hopped to the small patch of sand amid the restless sea. A few meters from where I was, some water was bubbling as if somebody had thrown a foam party at that spot. "Weird, what is that?"

"I threw a rock, and it sank to the bottom," a girl's voice emerges from my right. "It was a weird rock—gray and unnatural—like the one they covered over Andrei's home."

"Oh, you threw a—" I jumped in surprise, shifting my gaze to the presence before me. My knees weakened, my hands trembled, and my vision began to blur as I laid eyes on the creature before me. I fell on my back but quickly assumed an upright position to continue gazing at what I saw. "Y- y- you- you're a mermaid."

"Andrei is Andrei," he replies, revealing himself ultimately. Under the moon's illumination, his eyes were bluer and more vivid than the ocean. The black ebony hair that hung from his head was long but not long enough to cover his face. Lips as red as the corals that grew nearby and a golden complexion like the sun. "...and you are?"

"I'm Alexander," the fear and hostility I felt in my heart flowed away as I composed myself correctly. All the despair disappeared, overpowered by the new existence that I saw. *What was I about to do again?*

"What is Alexander doing here?" He lifts himself closer, exposing his teal scales to the air. "Not many humans are here during the full moon. Did you see Andrei throw that rock?"

"I was..." *about to take my life. There's no point in living anymore, but I can't tell him that.* I bit my lip and rushed back to shore. Ignoring Andrei's call for me as I escaped, running further inland.

~~~

"35 out of 70," my chemistry professor hands me the results of my midterm examination. "Don't hesitate to seek help, Mr. Paulo. You used to have high scores."

I returned straight home after that stressful school day. My life has not been the same ever since mom was gone. She was my light, my guide, the wind underneath my wings, but COVID-19 took her from me. And now there's nothing left for me to do. I have no family, and life has undoubtedly lost its meaning.

"Alexander, I'm here." *Weird enough, I can hear Andrei's voice inside my head. "I am calling out to you." What? Get out of my head. "Come to the beach; I'll show you something."*

~~~

The sunset painted the western sky orange, but in the east, it was napalm, and the water under it was blue. Andrei sat at the mouth where the sea touched the sand, letting the waves splash his tail, using his muscular arms to keep himself upright.

“Are you not afraid if other people see you?” I walk towards him, stopping where the waves would touch beyond my feet but not high enough that they would reach my ankles. “You’re so out here in the open.”

“We can detect other people from miles away—we’re the only ones here,” he began dragging himself to the water. Slowly but surely, he reached the deep waters where he could swim freely. “Come,” he extends his hand, asking for mine. “Don’t be afraid, trust me.”

Without hesitation, I jumped in the water and accepted his invitation. He holds my forehead and kisses it—an electrifying jolt courses through my body. He pulls me underwater before I could protest. I had my breath in, but he told me it was all right, and I could breathe underwater.

He took me to the seabed, where hectares of coral reefs grew. Blue, red, and green imbued the ocean floor like a Monet painting. All manner of sea

life also swam about—big and small—sparkling and shining against what light penetrated through the water.

“*We call this place koraller, a sanctuary for all marine life,*” I could hear his voice telepathically. “*Then, there’s this place,*” we reached a reef where the corals were black and bleaching.

“*What happened here?*” I held his hand tighter.

“*The koraller reflects the health of the sea, especially from your land. Reclamations have damaged the sea and the koraller with it,*” Andrei takes me closer to a coral polyp struggling to grow. “*Normally, the corals rebuild themselves, but it is difficult for them with the current state.*”

*These corals—they’re struggling and fighting to survive.* The brimming passion burning in Andrei’s blue eyes meant that something must be done, and this passion he shared with me. *There’s still hope. Hope?*

Suddenly, my mother’s words echoed, “*...serene filling all witnesses with hope.*” *This was the serenity I needed. The reason that I must continue to fight. My mother loved the sea. The stories of these corals must continue.*

~~~

"I'm so glad you could be here with us," my chemistry professor hands me a placard. "Our lives are all connected to the sea. These reclamations must stop."

"I am with you on that, professor." I lift the placard overhead, marching with the other activists as we approach city hall.

"You've changed, Mr. Paulo," my chemistry professor taps my shoulder as we walk on the sun-kissed pavement along with the rest of the crowd. She speaks under her mask, "You're more cheerful than you were—even better than how I remembered you—as if you've transformed into a completely different person."

"Thank you, professor. I've found a new meaning to life." The azure sky turned gray, and the dry air became desolate. "It seems like it's going to rain."

I turned to my professor only to see that they were frozen still—everyone in the crowd stood as if they were trapped in time.

"You have been embraced by one of them," a voice from the cumulonimbus above roars like a thunderclap. "Those wretches just can't stop interfering with my plans."

Black lightning strikes the city hall ceiling. From its ashes, a shadow whose form resembled a person approached. Everything died and wilted in their path. Even the pavement cracked and chipped.

*"You're not alone, Alexander."* Andrei's voice rang in my head. Suddenly, my forehead—the spot where he kissed me—glowed sapphire. A portal materializes before me. Andrei and others, along with him, come out of the portal. They carried tridents and shields and armor resembling scales that shone like silver. What shocked me the most was that they had feet instead of tails. "We have you surrounded, *Skygge*."

"Not today, you wretched fish," the distorted voice calls forth lightning towards us. Still, before it hit, Andrei lifted his trident, redirecting it to the clouds. The impact breaks the thunderclouds, disintegrating them. It flung shadow javelins, but Andrei and the other mermen deflected them using their shields.

"Now, banish it." They pierce the pavement around *Skygge* in a hexagonal formation. A waterspout forms around the shadow. Slowly, the shadow becomes deformed.

“I am the manifestation of despair and discord. I shall be reborn just as I have always been,” the shadow rumbles as it gradually vanishes.

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The golden sands on the beach—beaten and battered by the waves—shine against the moonlight. I sat on the soft sand letting the waves touch my feet. Moments later, Andrei emerges from the water extending his hand once more.

*“Let me show you something,”* he whispers in my mind.

I change into my swimming clothes and jump into the water. He took me to *koraller* and showed me the corals. My heart bloomed as my gaze landed upon the rebuilding corals. Hope is not mere, nor is it fragile. It transforms people and rebuilds us to become better versions of ourselves.

# The Blows and the Waves

By Keisiah Dawn T. Tiaoson

Hear! The gale with the waves —  
What nightmare and fright their swashing paves.  
How it reckons the fisherfolks' galore.

In the cold and misty night,  
The thunder clapped, and the heaven shrieked  
With the howls and the growls  
Of an approaching fright,  
The moon swallowed the reflection of my hope.

Who am I in this sea of uncertainty?  
What a fearful wonder I cast.  
Am I —  
Meg? Beth? Jo? Or Amy?  
Have I listened enough to Moonlight Sonata?  
Have I ever been, had ever been —  
To me?

Sans eyes around, I left my clothes.  
On the wings of my fancy;  
I raged against the current..  
Ah, and look! The droplets with the waves —  
What peace and harmony their ripple brings.  
How zephyr became gentle in an ordered monotone...

Feel! The merriness of the inside blur —  
What delight to sprinkle sand out of the bone  
With the humming and the barking  
of a playful dolphin calf.  
There's no human heart of stone...

And as apricots bud flow'rs,  
I left the shore...  
Sailed beyond the melancholy  
And let the wind brush my cheek  
With the sun on my face...

I'm sailing home to see me.

# There

By Arn Chelsea M. Malto

Numb, I shuddered from the cold. I've been here on multiple occasions, but it was never this dark before. What can I do to break away from this darkness, one that has followed me since? This place felt too quiet, too isolated. The eerie silence made my head pound.

*Badumb, badumb.*

My beating heart goes, reminding me that I am *alive*.

The sudden flash of light blinded me for a moment, and I almost refused to get up. The room was illuminated but felt gray. This was the new "normal", whatever normal means. Hidden inside the four walls of my room, in a nearly empty house. I would have stayed in bed, rolled over, and curled up, although that wasn't a possibility. I started that day with coffee as if I was old enough to drink it. Being fifteen in this beautifully horrible world was not something I asked for.

I did my normal routine; the same one I've been doing since being stuck in this concrete domain. It was draining, dare I say depressing. But all of that changed when I discovered the entryway.



I thought nothing of it at first, it was just a black barrel collecting water from the rain. But I felt the need to go on over and take a peek inside. Maybe it was the memory of bathing in a barrel as a child, but nostalgia wasn't the one beckoning me to it. When I reached the barrel, I dragged a finger across the water, attempting to cause a ripple.

I didn't expect it, some might not believe me, but the water dragged me in.

I couldn't recall if I screamed, closed my eyes, or whatsoever, it was all a big blur. It was dark but I could see. I couldn't describe if I was floating or drowning. Bubbles left my mouth and my limbs moved in sync to find a way to the surface if there was any. I fear drowning, and at the moment I thought I had, but when I felt my chest tighten, I let out a breath.

It was at that moment when I realized that I wouldn't drown, I looked around this void.

Little by little, specks of white followed by different shades of blue emerged, circling around me. As I floated aimlessly, I felt a rumble and, in a flash, I was thrown upward. Landing on what felt like grainy sand, I let out an exhale. The beach on this island is where I was, and it was the beginning of my journey in this utopia.

What a beautiful place it was, an infinite ocean. Only an island full of greenery, with a lone pearlescent castle in the middle. Engulfed in the night sky, the moon and stars served witness to my arrival. I started my walk towards the castle for I felt it calling me, enchanting me to open its doors. Inching closer with each step, finally I saw its grandness in full display. The castle was indeed a shining white, a lone pavilion with a garden filled with rows of lavenders, chrysanthemums, roses, and camellias.

This place was paradise, a home away from that dreadful structure, and I have never been happier.

I locked myself on this lonely island, basking in comfortable isolation. Walking alone by the beach or the forests helped me clear my mind, the scent of nature overtaking whatever negative emotion that crept. Exploring the castle and its many rooms, I opted to stay in the library, reading to my heart's content in complete silence.

I thought I'd be better off staying here, alone and contented, that was until she came.

After days on the island, I stared out from the balcony of a room in the castle. That was when I noticed a tar-like substance from the sea, making its way

to the sand. I made a run to the beach, thoughts consuming my once-empty mind and worry being the prominent feeling settling in my gut.

It was on the beach when I noticed her, never realizing she was here to destroy this paradise.

I never thought of her being dangerous when she crawled ashore. Fully encased in black, adorned in a melted wax-like texture ensemble, she was just a child. She looked terrified, gasping, and greedily breathing air in and out of her system. She noticed I was staring, and I was met with black soulless eyes. After what seemed like forever of looking into each other's eyes, she let out a high-pitched scream—one you could only hear in horror movies.

She rolled over in a fetal position and cried, screaming at me because I did something wrong.

Hesitating, I tried to go closer, asking her who she was and what I did wrong. She continued her fit, calling me the problem, saying I was the reason behind her pain. I didn't even know who she was, she had just appeared. "I was there all along," she whispered faintly before collapsing from exhaustion.

I thought that was the end of it. I thought I could take her in my arms and bring her to the castle. I planned to wait for her to wake up and ask for an

explanation.

But I was wrong, far from what I had thought, and I had to pay the price.

She levitated off the ground, a dark shadow-esque sphere surrounding her. Tiny sparks of black light flicked around the sphere. I froze in place, only able to turn, and I guessed it was her doing. The night sky was now covered in nimbus clouds, lightning flashed around, and the forest caught on fire. I watched, helpless, as the forest fire made its way to the castle. Dark soot and ashes tainted the once pure pearlescent white castle, the pavilion, and garden succumbing to the raging fires.

She looked somber, regretful even, but she did it. She had destroyed the utopia.

I screamed, begged, and asked her why she was doing this. She came out of nowhere and wreaked havoc on my peaceful domain. I didn't even notice the tears flowing down my cheeks as I attempted to get her attention. Finally, she did turn to look at me, crying herself. "You did this, this is all your fault! I didn't want to do this." I did not understand what she meant, until her appearance started to phase, like a glitch.

I looked as she phased from a little girl with black and soulless eyes, to me, albeit just a bit younger in white. Our brown eyes locked on one another, and I brought a hand to my mouth in disbelief. With the fire burning down behind us, the sphere around her disappeared and she dropped. I, too, was able to move once again. She sat on the sand, crying, and I kneeled before her.

I stared, a million thoughts racing across my mind as I tried to at least make a move. But we just sat in the sand, crying. Rain finally fell from the sky, extinguishing the flames. "I'm sorry, I did it again. I didn't mean to," were the words that came out of her mouth, wiping her runny nose with her sleeve. I moved closer before capturing her in a warm embrace.

I have always repressed my emotions, but I never knew it could personify into something so destructive when I just leave it be.

The island was now bare, the place where I temporarily escaped reality gone. The personification of my repression disappeared, leaving me alone once again. I looked around one last time. The experience taught me a lesson.

Standing on the shoreline, I took a deep breath in and dove into the sea, going back to the source that took me to this place. I was whisked away back to reality.

I was back in my room, but it didn't feel as cold as it was before. It now felt warm, like I was finally at home. With my newfound strength, I began to live again; not just existing as another flame in the world, waiting for the day to be extinguished.

I slowly worked with the child in me, reminding myself that I have endured and perceived through stormy seas, still continuing to sail with my ship. She taught me that escape is temporary and that hiding away would only cause my own destruction.

I may feel all alone and isolated, but she will be there. She has always been there.

# An Ode to the House of Job

By Jude Wilter Trinidad Domen

Bundles of stick hang heavy on the back  
of an old man as he picks up his slack  
To the farmlands he goes! Rebuild what was lost  
He carries on despite winter's unforgiving frost.

Wicked storm, shattered home, curse of disease  
a roar of pandemonium left a sorrowful sea  
souls wander the wood, houses in ruin  
gone are the days of joy and illusion.

His hands are a graveyard of regret and sorrow  
though he smiles wide, hopeful for tomorrow  
Little by little, a stick for a stick  
rebuild his (solemn) home with mortar and brick.

Hope and courage are the colour of his eyes  
alike the blissful light dancing in the skies  
Golden is the morning when hope is alive  
through the storms and endless peril, one will thrive.

(Spring has come, the work all done!)

He prays to the Lord above through the breeze  
cast in the moonlight on his brittle knees  
"I hope for better days, for kinder seas,  
I hope for better days, for kinder seas."

# Facing Life, Mask On

By Job I. Paculba

Walking the pavements of Silliman covered by the fabulous foliage of the giant acacias, I blast Taylor Swift's new song Bejeweled in my ear. "Best believe I'm still bejeweled when I walk in the room. I can still make the whole place shimmer." This image is my delusional expectation when entering the campus—everything would be shimmery and sophisticated—but rebuilding after two years of online classes takes away the glitter.

The past two years were difficult. I am one of many living in what the World Bank called "a country where the internet sucks." I vividly remember entering a class 30 minutes late because of the poor connection. Living in an area with scarce internet access, it didn't matter which network I was using. Both made me suffer. Even cable internet, which was present, was afflicted by the disease of sluggishness.

It had to stop. I couldn't survive college if I settled on the choppy classes and cut-short calls. I began traveling to cafes in my locality. The connection is not particularly great either, but it was better than settling for the pathetic

performance at my home. It was a one-hour ride, so I woke up at five AM to prepare for my seven AM classes. On days it rained, I covered my laptop and other gadgets with plastic to prevent them from getting wet.

Doing that every day for the last two years made me yearn for face-to-face life. My head wrapped around the idea that everything would be better if classes were in person. And for my skill-based course, it was true. I couldn't learn venipuncture online nor master the skills through watching videos. Medical technology skills are not exactly like learning to play guitar or make pottery, where watching videos would suffice. It takes time to learn and master these abilities, which requires courage.

During my sophomore year, dilapidation was the epitome of my mental health. I was irritable day to day. All my dreams and goals vanished into the void of digital disparity. I thought it was only me that suffered, but there were others whose consequences were more unfortunate than mine. At that point, I realized that we were all broken and sad. The dreams that I had were lost.

Contrary to my high school life, when I was an overachiever, I exerted effort just enough to make me pass. I lost my motivation. On the night before the

midterms, I read the Hunger Games trilogy instead of studying. If I got a passing grade, it was enough. It continued until a plot twist occurred.

Face-to-face classes. The thing I wanted the most finally came to allow me to bask in its presence. I can finally achieve the independence and freedom that I always wanted. I may finally experience college life and have the fun I have searched for these past two years. I can eventually leave this abode of stress that drives me to madness. These were the thoughts that permeated my mind. Only to find out that face-to-face life would not be so different.

Finding a dormitory and a boarding house was a hassle. As for me, who wanted nightlife and freedom, living in the school dormitory was a no-no, making the search more difficult. When I found the perfect place, I had to look for a stable but affordable source of food and water, among many other needs I had to meet.

It was stressful, but a different kind of stress. During the online class, I had no power to confront my anxiety because the internet was something beyond my abilities. But surviving in a city out of my comfort zone provided tension that welcomed growth. Brimming hope allowed me to adapt, replacing the fear that once blocked me from doing things.

Combining adulting and academics is not the best picture. But living away from my family transformed me into a better version of myself. There is only me to take care of myself. “I’m on my own now” was a premise both terrifying and exciting. I had independence, but I could rely on myself—or at least that was how I believed it to be.

I wasn’t alone in college. I had friends who shared my struggles. We are never truly alone. There will always be people kind enough to extend a hand. It was one of the beauties of face-to-face, which was absent from the online setting. Human touch and personal interaction give a warmth different from seeing their faces on a call.

Face-to-face may not be the glittery painting that I picture. Its shimmer is another light that allows growth and improvement. As the semester progresses, we are regaining our lost dreams with hope as we transform and rebuild ourselves, facing life, mask on.

## Bidlisiw sa Huwaw

By Jovanie B. Garay

Kung kanus-a ang kalibotan giagian sa huwaw  
Ang singot misubay sa akong buko-buko  
Ug nahimong bahanding tinubdan  
Sa naughang tanaman

Ang pagkigharong sa hagit  
Mipalunhaw sa tabunok nga bangketo  
Ang yuta misaad sa pagpaturok  
Sa lisong gitisok human gisihagan  
Sa pahiyom sa bidlisiw

Ang kapuslanan sa pakigtigi sa panahon  
Nanahon misanga namulak diha  
Sa akong palad nga maoy gibatogan  
Sa di maihap nga mga langgam



# Aftermath

By Yudi Santillan III

The year 2021, in December was not something most Visayans would forget. It would already be more than a year after I have written this piece. You'll never be the same after incidents like these. There are just a few things that stay with you even in the aftermath. In my experience, I went through three different kinds of realizations, of loss, that changed me forever.

The first was thinking that I knew loss when I looked around and saw how our bodega with walls still standing was filled with the ruins of branches and leaves, and the thought of the time and people it would take to clean it up; when I saw how torn the roll-up barriers were as if it was paper money ripped into pieces, the sounds it made orchestrated by the percussion of the wind was almost as harmonious as the cost for us to replace it; when the roof of our dirty kitchen was plucked by something that was looking to devour but we were lucky enough that it left us alone.

Then I realized that I never really knew loss when I laughed at the electrical posts holding hands as they bowed down in the streets as if to say they

had done their service. I never really knew loss when I jested about how trees were bent the other way with their lifeless, leafless frame. The relief that it was only leaves that decorated our house. I never really knew loss when I found it hilarious that the owner of a phone store was just standing there while people were looting (add something like his livelihood), picking up phones that were damaged from when the sea rose and entered their establishment.

Then I stepped on a roof that barricaded the street and wondered what had happened to the family it was supposed to shelter. I saw a wall flat on the ground and was told by a child how they were cowering behind it. I heard stories of how people had lost everything when the sea and the wind swept it away, and how the trees decided to take shelter in their homes. These were the moments when I knew loss. The kind of loss realizing the possibility of a friend losing her entire family due to the storm raged into my thoughts. Believe me when I say this could have easily been one of those pieces. Thankfully it isn't.

It is the kind of loss I knew I didn't have to experience firsthand to feel. The kind of loss that I only had to be thirsty to the very least empathize with the people who were standing in long lines to get water to drink- to be hungry but only imagine those who haven't had food in days- trying to figure out what to

wear and wonder about those who have lost their all. I know they are holding on or at least trying, but resiliency is such an old song we sing as people in harmony—an intermission in between disasters. I often find myself singing in falsetto while others force themselves to sing even though they are out of tune. What choice do they have?

It is the kind of loss that made me realize the privilege of having only to carry the lessons and the memory of loss. The realization that I am the one who is out of tune. It is the kind of loss that made me realize that maybe it's time to change the song. A song of hope and action.

# Ode to Rain

By F. Jordan Carnice

What came as a vision was  
first a peck from the gentlest rain,

prompt and cool, an inauguration  
of renewal drop after drop.

The stiff ground groans in relief.  
Grass in the air. Bodies mass

towards each other as if finally  
becoming unhalved, complete.

Doors and windows are slightly  
opened, closed to those who

cannot be bothered: eyes  
that do not see have always

seen enough. Soon the rest of the rain  
arrives with its silvered spindly legs,

kicking leaves aside with a kid's  
calm, tickling dirt and sprouts

to reveal themselves. Everything  
has to start from somewhere.

# Stuck In That Cave

By Kane W. Holem

A light shone in the darkness. What appeared in its own place was what, from far away, looked sort of like a human man. But, in fact, he was not.

For what appeared was an extraterrestrial. A little green man that could be mistaken for a human, maybe in costume.

He looked around. He saw darkness, nothing but caves and rock formations. Some crystals. And... a fire, likely snuffed out quickly.

The green man tried to take out his flashlight, but it didn't work. His oxygen didn't work either, but luckily this planet had much of it to spare. And of course, neither did his weapons.

He slumped onto the ground of the cave. He sat crisscrossed and scratched his face in agitation. If there was someone here, he wouldn't be able to face them.

He looked to his side. From one of the crevices of the cave, he could see something living. Something moving, peeking out from the wall.

The green man simply sat, docile.

The thing peeked out from his rocky wall. It was a caveman.

He was confused. What was this... whatever it was, doing right now?

Scared, he walked, quietly as he could, a rock in his large, calloused hand.

He, of course, had never seen one of these things before. But... it didn't attack him at first sight. Any animal that did that, well...

The caveman sat next to this green man. The green man looked at him and did nothing. "Who... are you?" spoke the caveman.

"I'm here by accident." Explained the green man. "And now I have no idea what to do. Everything I have on me is useless now."

"You are not... from here." The caveman scratched his nose. "Why are you here?"

"I had an emergency landing. I was in danger. I ended up here. Stuck in a cave."

"Not stuck." The caveman stood. "The exit is over this way. But it is blocked." He pointed at what looked like a wall. But it only seemed to be a cave-in.

"I guess we have all the time in the world to talk." The green man said to the caveman, but also somewhat to himself. "Why are you here?"

"I went inside this cave because my village needed food. I came in here in search of bat meat.

"Bat meat?"

"Yes. We were stocked up on fruits, but we had a thirst for meat. When I was searching, a shaking closed up the entrance."

The alien looked at the stones that covered the entrance. It was completely blocked off. There was no way they could get out of here.

"Why are you so calm about it then?" The green man said. "Why aren't you fearing for your life? You're never going to get out of here. You're stuck inside. All because they told you to look for bat meat."

"That is not true." He spoke. "They will get me out. That I know for sure."

"You don't know that." Said the alien. "They might have gotten you stuck on purpose. Did you ever think of that?"

"No." The caveman voiced bluntly. "I trust them."

"What good is trust? How do you know what to trust? What not to trust?"

"If I can't trust anything or anyone..." The caveman said, "Blindly, without any reason at all to think so... I think that would be... not smart."

"Not smart. How so?"

The caveman looked at them. "I am not here to change your opinions. I trust them. You may not. Not trusting the people that you know are going to save you doesn't feel right."

"Blindly trusting people doesn't feel right either."

"You trusted me sitting down next to you when I started talking to you and didn't attack you. Did you not?"

The alien looked at him.

"That's different."

"Or is it?" The caveman sat down when both of them flinched at the sound of the rock walls starting to get chipped away.

"They are finally here." spoke the caveman. "I trusted them to find me, and they trusted me to be here."

"What if these aren't the people you trust outside?" The alien asked him. "What if these are enemies?"

"Then I guess we'll just have to find out for ourselves." The caveman said as a crack of light shined onto his face.

# Yamog

By Jovanie B. Garay

Ang naugang mga liso sa atsal  
Nga akong giluyong adtong miaging semana,  
Mihinay-hinay og buak sa yutang gikaang.

Mibarog ang mga gagmayng punoan,  
Nanghiwid sa gilukdong kalibotan.  
Ug nianang pinong lunhawng dahon

Midagayday ang natibuok nga  
Yamog sayo sa kabuntagon ug  
Bugnawng mituhop sa akong dughan.

# Liway Translates to Dawn

By Keisiah Dawn T. Tiaoson

There are things better left unheard, better left unsaid. There are stories worth weaving, and there are some which seem to have no significance with a 99% level of confidence. If I write my life story, my heaven, and my hell, all will have a hard time believing -- so I have decided not to write my own. Not because I fear no soul cares, not because I feel like I'll still be lost afterwards, no, definitely none of these. I just know that Liway's story is better and that hers is a great story to tell.

Oh, but the world is wide and full of two contradicting sides. There are pavements sprinkled with rose petals, and there are those which are like peppers in an appetizing soup, however, molded a little spiky, a little pointy, a little bully. Funnily, despite its Lilliputian, pygmy, shrimpy size, a huge pain in the feet. There are also chromatic mornings -- a morning that lets you inhale hope. You get to hear the birds sing in a spectacular chorus, and you get the privilege of being visited by happiness from sunlight to sunset. There are also monotonic mornings which look just like night. Liway, an amour propre -- proud, certain,



and assertive, is a welcomer of that bright sunny day with a smile that even angels couldn't resist seeing. She is being guided by the Supreme Being of this vast universe. Her spirit, which is filled with spice and shimmer, never, no not once, ever faltered. I, on the other hand, am a perfect definition of mess, the color of shame, and the rhythm of radiant sights never visited me.

Liway put shame on the red roses with the fragrance of her existence, and she embarrassed the sky with the glory that follows her. She is young and free to swirl with the winds of life. She sails wherever the ocean would take her just like a voyager afraid of no Mariana's living creature. Her heart is her compass. Her laughter is her guide. She can sleep while the biggest wolves in the world blow her straw house. She is staunch, rising from the waters of the well, unafraid of whatever there may be. She is an entire plantation of dreams and aspiration, driving her life all the way up to the zenith.

Nothing can make her tremble, not a ground's disco, not tornados, not even a terrifying volcanic eruption. She is one with the wind, only gentler than the summer zephyr. Millions of giants cannot scatter her soul into multiple segments. She has the spirit of a deity. She graced her world with humility, faith,

perseverance, and love. Nothing ever could make her feel less, feel far, feel unalive – for her identity was found in her loving God.

Liway, however, was someone else's before she became a lady who found meaning and strength in the Father's loving arms. She was someone you know, but I'll never name. Liway was a rat in a kitchen hole trying to hide and squeak whenever spotted. She feared being seen, of being able to interact, of being caught doing what she thinks she's good at. She feared the people she grew up with. Liway spent all those days trying to figure out how to escape the monster that munches her bones to ashes. Hiding in a hole was never easy, for she was never a friend of the dark. She always was once outside playing in the garden of bliss just before the dew leaves the roses' leaves.

Oh, that garden centuries ago was full of adelfa, roses, and sampaguitas which made her day better than just the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. The tall acacia watches over the entire garden and swings its branches all day long as the birds harmonize in a lovely tune of love. The green grasses cover the soil, making the petrichor more noticeable after every rain. That garden was surely a place of sprouting courage to go where her heart delights, but a great black ball covered the sun making it seemingly impossible to do its part. A part of teaching Liway

the language of the flowers, a part of showing her what glowing and growing means. Shadow filled the garden and killed those that aspired to bloom. That garden that could compete with the colors of the color wheel became nothing more than a blank space of forgotten hope. The sudden darkening of the sun made Liway fear what tomorrow might bring. She lived her life during those days like a fish plucked from the ocean and tossed away into a suffocating aquarium with no soul to share the heaviness brought by a sudden transition. The ocean's stage is the extension of her spirit, the very thing her heart beats for. She fought somehow and swam right towards the raging current but would end up in a circle of synthetics that never ends. If she really was a fish, that ocean millions of miles away is her home. The infinite sound of a tintinnabulation, the giggle of the school, and the chuckle of the band arranged in one huge orchestra was her ultimate peace. In there, she was surrounded with varieties of species working hand in hand to sing one ocean song in chorus. A song that all may hum along to as the strings invisibly found in each of the beating hearts strum altogether.

The idea of masquerading in a ghost town petrified her, for even in the closed polygon, there are shadows that stretch out one hand, the most gigantic hands she had ever seen. She lost all her defenses and could never do anything but

let those hands curve around her being. In that instance, she knew that those shadows didn't take her peace alone but also the value she put on herself. She could not find the force to even lift a finger that time, not even to stop the involuntary trembling of her legs and lips, and when she could not feel her body anymore, the monsters laid her down where she grasped and moaned. The shadows grinned and shifted as the sun kissed the aquarium's water.

That happened once a week, then every day, then multiple times a day. She was unable to break free from the spell of a dark elixir. Liway floated above the tank, breathing yet dead. A year after completely losing her hues, she jumped out from the aquarium to escape the ghouls. Lynette, a woman after God's own heart, came near her and stayed despite her brokenness. She carried her in her breast and moved her across the calm. Lynette became her blanket in an icy castle, her lighthouse, her soup on rainy days.

She gave Liway vanilla ice cream. An ice cream that made her forget what those years of being locked with a monster made her feel. She brushed all her fears away and kissed her anxiousness goodbye. Lynette became Liway's acacia, the one who looks out for her in a place she is unfamiliar with, the one that stands with her against the lighting, the tree that sheltered her even though

she is a galaxy away. Ultimately, Lynette fixed her broken spirit and stopped her from giving low value to herself. She trained Liway the ways of Christ and how the Lord makes everyone new despite the rust inside their hearts.

It is only with the name the Lord calls us that we may associate our worth with. Our values do not deteriorate as we experience being inside an immeasurably deep empty space. There are people who touch our hearts with great warmth that will deliver the long-lost jigsaw piece in our spirit. There are people who will introduce Christ to us and will bless us with their loving kindness. They will favor us. They will protect us. They will give us more reasons to believe in goodness. They will show us how to live and how to be gentle even to those who caused us great melancholy.

Well, you can find Liway wherever the wind would take her. She tells the story of her restored hope, forgiveness, healing, and radiant hues of love to everyone she meets. Spot her, for she often introduces herself as Dawn.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Jovanie B. Garay** is an English instructor at Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU). His works on poetry, short stories, and essays in Binisaya are published in Manila Bulletin's Bisaya Magazine, Kabisdak Literary Lighthouse, Katitikan, and Dagmay.online-Literary Journal of Davao Writers Guild. He was a fellow for Balak in the 59th Silliman University National Writers Workshop (SUNWW) 2021 and 21<sup>st</sup> Iyas National Writers' Workshop 2022 for his sugilanon. Jovanie has recently self-published two e-books: Mga Lamat sa Balak (2022), a poetry collection, and Panulo (2022) for fiction. He continues to write using his mother tongue for he believes literature written by regional writers has its own identity, especially in Mindanao, where richness in cultures is housed on one beautiful island.

**Raphael Luis J. Salise** is a Creative Writing graduate of the University of the Philippines Mindanao. His poems have previously appeared in Likhaan: UP Institute of Creative Writing, Dagmay Literary Journal, SunStar Davao, Philippines Graphic, and UNESCO. He has also been a fellow to a handful of writing workshops, including the Ateneo de Davao Summer Writers Workshop, Davao Writers Workshop, Cebu Writers Workshop, and NAGMAC Young Writers Studio. Raph is currently taking up a Juris Doctor degree at Silliman University, where he "tries" (emphasis supplied) to write poems in his free time.

**Keisiah Dawn T. Tiaoson**, 21, is a lady who strives to live her life aligned with the standard of goodness, humility, and gentleness. She was born and raised in La Carlota City where she finished her Senior High School with flying colors. She is a debater, having tons of regional and national awards. She is currently trying to get her bachelor's degree in Chemistry in Silliman University. She wants to travel around her country after graduating and will enroll in Silliman Law the following year. She also plans to write self - help books and goodnight stories for children.

**Junelie Anthony Velonta** is a Dumagueteño. In 2015, he graduated from Philippine Science High School—Central Visayas Campus and is now pursuing a Physics degree in Silliman University. He was a fellow for the 1<sup>st</sup> Cebu Writers’ Workshop, the 60<sup>th</sup> Silliman University National Writers Workshop, and the 2022 DLSU Young Screenwriters’ Workshop. Although a STEM major, he likes to daydream about and explore the use of local languages in both poetry and fiction.

**Bereka Praise A. Amoroso**, 18 years of age, is currently a first-year college student taking an undergraduate degree in Bachelor of Science in Psychology at Silliman University, Dumaguete City. When struck with motivation and/or boredom, she composes songs, plays the guitar and bass, writes short stories, watches film and tv as well as reading/writing scripts, and listens to several genres of music.

**Ferdaus T. Tahir** is an aspiring love poet and was born in Dumaguete City. He is currently studying for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science formerly from San Beda University and now Silliman University this school year. Previously, he was elected as a Literary Head in 2021 for “The Spires”, an official student literary publication of San Beda University. He is currently compiling his list of love poems for his collection which he intended to publicize his works to the world. Furthermore, he also strives to create a masterpiece that leaves a mark in the pages of history.

**F. Jordan Carnice** is a creative writing graduate at Silliman University and an IT graduate at STI College. His works have appeared in *Ani*, *Novice*, *Santelmo*, *ALPAS*, *Philippines Free Press*, *Philippines Graphic Reader*, *Philippine Speculative Fiction*, *Anomaly*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, among several others, and soon in the forthcoming issue of the University of the Philippines Institute of Creative Writing’s *DX Machina Journal*. He is a recipient of fellowships from writing workshops in Dumaguete, Iligan, and

Bacolod, and he has served as a panelist twice in the Taboan Writers Festival. He has won the poetry grand prize in the 2020 Cebu Climate Emergency Literature and Arts Competition for his poem “There is Too Much Light in this World” and he has authored two poetry chapbooks—*Weights & Cushions* (2018) and *How to Make an Accident* (2019). Also a visual artist who is currently based in Bohol, he can be found online through Instagram (@thebullfrog and @art.bullfrog) and Twitter (@thebullfrog\_).

**Jude Wilter Trinidad Domen** is a Grade 11 student currently studying Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Mathematics at Silliman University Senior High School. He is from Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental though he resides in Vernon Hall, Silliman University whenever he is in Dumaguete City. He is a passionate lover of music, fond of the musical genres of rock, indie, folk, pop, and new wave. He has Vampire Weekend, Taylor Swift, Led Zeppelin, John Mayer, and the Fleet Foxes on the loop on his Spotify playlists. These days, you may find him loitering around Silliman campus (often frolicking in the library) or stuck up in Kalauman Hall.

**Zarelle Glen Dorothy A. Villanzana**, also called Lili, was born on June 28, 2005, in the city of golden friendship, Cagayan De Oro City. When she entered Silliman University in eleventh grade under the Humanities and Social Sciences strand, she became a staff writer in the university’s student publication, the Weekly Sillimanian. She was a feature writer for the school year 2021-2022. Currently, Lili is in her last year of high school as the HUMAD Vice Mayor in the Senior High School Student Council. She also became a member of the CDO Bloggers group, although she only occasionally posts on her blog.

**Khail Campos Santia** is an interdisciplinary creative practitioner engaged in game design, engineering, and art; learning design; product design; breadcraft; and writing. He was born in Cagayan de Oro City and raised in Bukidnon. He matriculated in the University of the Philippines Diliman, Xavier University, and

Silliman University but on the whole pursued an independent program of study. Campos Santia's writings have appeared in the Weekly Sillimianian, Dumaguete Metropost, Sunstar, Gamesauce, and Tech in Asia. He is a Fellow of the Silliman University National Writers' Workshop and the Edilberto and Edith Tiempo Creative Writing Center. He advocates for community cats and volunteers as a coordinator for the Dumaguete Hermits Society.

**Job Paculba** with his background in campus journalism equipped him with the necessary skills to pursue my passion. He used to write editorial articles, then feature, and finally science and technology compositions, which, after sessions of honing his skill, earned a spot at the National Schools Press Conference back in 2020. He writes novels and has three signed works in total. His story at Silliman University started at the Institute of Clinical Laboratory Sciences. Now he is a junior Medical Technology student, and his days are filled with the misadventures of infamous pathogens and their useful-to-humanity cousins. He is the Executive Secretary of the Silliman University Medical Technology Society. He is also a scholar of DOST-SEI.

**Arn Chelsea M. Malto** (she/her), or simply Chelsea, is an eighteen-year-old Creative Writer and self-proclaimed Poet currently in twelfth grade enrolled in Silliman University Senior High School under the Humanities and Social Sciences Strand. She is a part of Artista Sillimianiana, one of her Universities Organizations, and a member of its Infomedia and Marketing committee. Malto continues to write with her tears and soul, aiming that her works can resonate with her readers and hopefully inspire and give them insight.

**Kane Holem** is a half-American half-Filipino who moved from America to the Philippines in the Early 2010s. He is currently schooling in Silliman College majoring in Mass Communications. He currently lives with one parent, his father. He is an aspiring writer and normally gets inspirations for his writings from mythology, religion, movies, and songs. He hopes to one day write for

several different mediums of storytelling.

**Maria Mirjana M. Calunod** is currently a 21-year-old Intern from Silliman University, studying Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy. Writing has always been one of her hobbies she's most passionate of. She was an Inter-School Regional Editorial Writer last 2015 and 2016. Along with her admiration for journalism, Mirjana's subtle interest for the sci-fi astronomy, mystery and prose poetry genres of fiction stretches to figurative language. Mirjana also has a special regard for stop-motion films, scriptwriting crafts, and chess, hoping to finally be able to uncover the hidden secrets in the spaces between words and clouds as she strives for a novel completion one day.

**Paul Ray G. Donaire** is a freshman majoring in sociology at Silliman University. He is a news writer at the Weekly Sillimianian (AY 2022-2023) and a freelance writer at Ripple VAs. Ray is a member of the Junior Anthropologists & Sociologists Society. He has a keen interest in the field of political and environmental sociology.

**Dane Zelle Digal** is currently studying in Silliman University in the course of BS Psychology. Dane was born in Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental. She is currently 19 years old and was born after the hectic new year on January 3rd of 2004. She has always enjoyed writing as a hobby even from a young age. During her early years in elementary, she was trained in journalism, where her writing skills expanded from just writing stories to publishing articles in the feature category and news category. She believes that everyone can write, all it takes is practice and passion for the topic that you are writing about. She dreams of being a practicing psychiatrist one day and hopes that what she has learned from writing will still help her in her journey up ahead.

**Marielle V. Godoy** is a junior BS Psychology student at Silliman University. But she was born and raised at Brooke's Point, Palawan. Marielle came from a humble

background and was raised in a family that has always made God the center of their lives. Her tatay and natay instilled in her the importance of loving her siblings and always treating others with respect and humility. On the other hand, Marielle attended Puerto Princesa City National Science High School (STEM strand) i senior high school. Back then, she thought of following her mother's footsteps as a nurse. Nonetheless, Marielle made a complete 360° turn as she decided to pursue a degree in Psychology during the pandemic. Because she has seen the need for mental health professionals in the country, especially when depression and other psychological diseases take its toll on the public during the height of Covid-19.

## THE EDITORS

**Pia Villareal** is a Literary and Cultural Studies major of Silliman University. She has dabbled in writing all her life and has been honing the craft for just as long. Now, she occasionally shells out a piece or two decent enough for the outside world while the crises of ambition and greatness plague her. She gets herself drunk on fiction hoping this is enough to fill the empty spaces of her hunger.

**Isabel Torres** is a senior Creative Writing student at Silliman University. She was a fellow for poetry in the 59<sup>th</sup> SUNWW. She enjoys rainy days and spending time at home cocooned in her own world of comfort. Isabel is passionate about writing and one day dreams of traveling the world while writing about her adventures.

**Yudi Santillan III** is a Creative Writing major in Silliman University. A spoken word poet who won first place in the CESAFI: Bangga sa Balak back in 2020. He enjoys performing his pieces together with the Stray Poets Collective. A literary group in Cebu that consists of poets, artists, screenwriters, etc., which helped him cultivate his skill in writing poetry.



The *Sands & Coral* primarily accepts contributions from students currently enrolled at Silliman University. It is our belief that students are capable of producing literary pieces which can endure comparison with those of more experienced writers, thus the literary folio also accepts submissions from faculty, staff, and alumni, as well as former fellows of the Silliman University National Writers Workshop. The publication aims to maintain a higher literary standard among campus writers, to stimulate genuine creative thinking, and to develop a keener appreciation of the more serious creations of Silliman writers.

## CLOSING RANKS

“What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche of Germany. And Albert Camus of France: “There is no fate that cannot be surmounted with scorn.” Two of the great philosophical voices of a previous, the twentieth, century articulating the classic, humanist response to adversity. There is another response, the prayerful “Deliver us from evil.”

### YONDER

In the city at least silent nights are back  
People find it easier to hit the sack  
No matter the thought of the unthinkable,  
The word or the name and its unspeakable  
Rhyme with, God forbid, Aurora Borealis.  
Perhaps nature can't help itself. Realize  
Perhaps the night sky wants to appear only,  
To be seen, to be touched by baby brightly  
As in the Christmas cards and carols, painted  
By Van Gogh and Verschuier, to be pointed  
At by man and woman when heaven rises  
They being the only species that looks up  
As on Halley's, all pupils and irises –  
Bring back the day and night, Lord. But will we stop?

**Cesar Ruiz Aquino**

