

LITERARY SECTION

THREE POEMS

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About the author

Paolo Manalo teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. He is currently reading for a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of St. Andrews.

INSIDE OUT

“If you’re lost outdoors in the forest or the woods
Take off your shirt and wear it inside out.
This breaks the spell the spirits placed on you...”
Lola’s words on my thirteenth birthday.

One time my brother tried this on a girl.
He wore his shirt reversed and pounced on her.
“Please help me find the path to happiness.
The short cut’s in your heart.” She broke his nose.

But now they live together in the Village
Of Lost Things: where inside out is in.
Sometimes I visit when I cannot find my keys.
They’ll marry once my brother finds the ring.

FAMILY REUNION

Inside his coffin my Lolo's smiling
While Mother glares at Auntie sneaking out of frame
And Uncle laughs at his own jokes again.

Once more the flash has made my father blind.
You'll know my Lola by the way she looks
With eyes that follow you around the room.

My cousins hog the front row. All dressed in black
They think the color makes them slim. They pose
Like supermodels. But cameras don't lie.

From the back row, my sisters crown them all
With signs of peace: V-signs that, on those heads,
Become the Devil's horns as we say "Cheese!"

MY SEX LIFE ON YOUTUBE

I clicked on the link: it's a video of me
Having sex in some seedy apartment. It isn't clear
Who the other person is, or if it even is a person
But there are chicken feathers everywhere.

Ridiculous, the forms these pleasures take:
I've zoomed the video and down to the scar
It's me. When last I checked I wasn't sexy.
The feathers help, the mask, the candle wax.

I'm a kite flying from my lover's back—
Something I've never tried because I thought
It wouldn't work. But I'm happy they're happy
Weighed down by so many things, and yet so free.

How is it possible to look so depraved
And laugh naturally like innocent children?
I raise the volume, I want my wife to hear
And I want to hear them with eyes closed.

That's how she catches the man she married:
Half-clothed and kissing the screen.
I'm there, wherever it is that lovers go
When they kiss so close they don't see each other.

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