

POEMS FROM “POST-SOMETHING”

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About the Author

Franz Joel Libo-on is currently finishing his MFA in Creative Writing at De La Salle University-Manila. His first collection of poems, *Humigit-Kumulang*, was published by High Chair in 2013. He lives in Novaliches.

Our garden has a cemented floor with no plants

Mom used to place her orchids there
while dad obsessed over what type of grass to use.
We had a calamansi tree
after we plucked all the leaves off our malunggay.

I used to say I'm sorry when I hit a plant with a ball.
I still do now, except one time
I almost tore a plant to pieces
because I was sad. I think I cried.

My uncle was the only one at home that time so when he went
outside I faked sleeping while holding the plant.
I was still sort of crying then but already thinking happy thoughts.
My uncle's dead now. We replaced the plant

with a fake cactus from my mom's office.
Now that the fake cactus is gone
only our pictures remain on her office table
but it still smells like she has one.

For the record I don't know how a fake cactus smells
because when it was in our garden
the garden still smelled like our garden.
But I don't go there anymore

because stray cats took over the place.
We had that problem with frogs before
and I remember being scared that our house
would soon be filled with frogs. Now thank god it's cats.

It's hard to imagine a house filled with frogs.
At least on TV they show houses filled with cats
and they seem like normal houses filled with people,
maybe that's why no one has voiced their concern yet.

Mom just shoos them out whenever they get in her way,
while dad, if not in the car, is almost always asleep.
I, when not busy playing computer games,
make sure to go home just to sleep.

There are other things happening

The jar slipped from my hand as I smelled the coffee.
Then when my sister said she saw a running turtle
I only asked "where?" I didn't know why
I was late for work that day
and why they didn't even reprimand me.
All I remembered was thinking of buying a can opener,
I even nodded my head and said "buy a can opener"
to myself then turned around to see if someone saw me
and smiled at what I did,
just like what the old lady beside me did.
But at the end of the day I didn't even
get to buy one. Earlier I was watching a movie
with a guy running in a dark passageway.
What's funny was that
I found it funny that after he ran,
he entered an elevator
and smashed some guy's skull
until the elevator walls were splattered with blood.
I asked myself if I could do that
but I don't know if that's even the reason why I'm laughing at it.
It was like that time when I asked my mom
if she tends to forget things right away
because I wanted to tell the story
of how one day my brother and I
got shooed away from her friend's house
after singing Christmas carols.
I cringe whenever I remember I was thinking
we would get a 20 peso bill from them because they knew us.
I can't seem to get that off my mind.
Our neighbor's knocking on the door now
but since I usually see him inside his house
I didn't open the door.
He knocked 11 times before stopping.

Old ladies

The old lady who saw me get off the train
to board another train with the same route
5 minutes later will have her opinions

about what I did. I'll lose some sleep
thinking about what she thought of what I did,
while she thinks about it the whole night.

She'll form an opinion about "kids today"
and that will help me get to know more
about myself. I will call myself "defiant",

listen to punk music at full volume
so it will all be legit, and doodle would-be
tattoos on the back of my notebook while in class.

Meanwhile the old lady will discipline
her son. They will go to church every Sunday
and not have him watch TV when it's way past bedtime.

Sometimes, the old lady will ask her son
what would he like to be when he grows up
so she can say to him that "you could be an engineer".

The old lady will tell that to her friends,
and the old lady's friends will start patting his head.
"Come here our little engineer," they will say.

On the other hand, I will join a group of kids
that shoplifts at 7/11's. I will come to our meeting place
in a navy blue hoodie because I feel safe in it.

I will talk about shoplifting an apple C2 bottle
because among all the C2 bottles it has the darkest shade.
I will also talk about getting a Quaker Oats cookie.

When we get there I will pay the cashier 5 pesos less
then run as fast as I can. I will be thankful I brought
a little money to use as cover up.

Meanwhile the old lady's son will study engineering
for 1 year then will shift to sociology.
While on the train ride home, he will think "political science."

Road guide

On trains whenever your arms hit somebody, you will get a stare.
Whenever you sneeze inside a bus, those who see you will cover their mouths.
If you ask people for directions they will with their lips.
If you're a guy sitting beside a girl, you have a motive.
If you're a girl sitting beside a guy, you are hoping for something to happen.
Even if you moved away and he already woke up,
your seatmate's head will still fall on your shoulder, asleep.
Your seatmate will be irritated once you sit down with your backpack on.
You will never really call your seatmates 'seatmates'.
On jeepneys you can sit between two people's knees.
If you say "excuse me" to those who were standing inside a train they will move
their bodies without moving to a side.
On buses the last ones to fill up are the back seats,
while on jeepneys it's the middle ones.
In a shuttle, if you're a girl you will choose to sit in front.
If you're first in a shuttle and you sit at the back, you are up to something.
If you're running, and you are not a robber, you are being robbed.
If you are in a rush you will walk faster.
If you ride a cab you really want to get there.
If you ride a pedicab you are a tourist.
If you went out of a queue, something happened.
On the road if you're just standing, you are waiting.
If you're walking, you really don't want to get there.