FOUR POEMS

Francis Paolo Quina
University of the Philippines Diliman
fpmquina@gmail.com

About the Author
Francis Paolo Quina earned his BA Creative Writing degree from the University of the Philippines Diliman, where he currently teaches at the Department of English and Comparative Literature. He also serves as the Deputy Director of The UP Institute of Creative Writing. He is currently working on his master’s degree in Creative Writing from the same university.
Special Relativity

Correspondence released only last week shows (Einstein) as a thoughtless man who felt free to discuss his affairs — and complain about being chased by love-crazed women — in letters to his second wife Elsa and even to his stepdaughter Margot.

“E = Einstein, the galactic womanizer,” The Sunday Times, July 16, 2006

How they must have loved that man. Look At the photos of him. He looked so helpless. With a face like that, they reasoned, He must be a good man. It shouldn't matter That he was married. Those women, they knew Gravity, being held down. Are we not all shoe-horned Into things for which we’ve no passion? This poor man with his wild hair and child-like Smile must be made to feel what it is to be Loved: this man must be shown all of creation.
Marriage Contract

My friend and I had an arrangement (a cliché, Really) about getting married if we're single By 30. It's only logical, we agreed, the idea Of spending the rest of our lives together.

We liked each other when we were young

And stupid, which was when we had it all Figured out. We imagined our life together, The ordinary day-to-day business Of dishes and laundry; on weekends, What to do; and where to spend holidays.

We were not desperate: just forward-thinking.

It never hurts to have contingencies for when Things don't go as intended. She wanted to act, Be a star. Maybe a singer, too. And I had a silent Desire to make meaningful everything.

Even those things I could not begin to imagine:

Like how we might meet again many years Later, along a supermarket aisle, both of us heavy With groceries and the baggage of years past. We would talk the way strangers do, and part the same way, uneasily, both of us trying To remember what we even liked about each other.
Commuting

I'm beginning to recognize the coming end of a line.  
I can feel its approach, where I must fall  
Off to the next line, the next stanza.

That isn't a claim to mastery. More  
A growing understanding of control,  
Like someone learning to drive.

Not that I would know. Growing up,  
We didn't have a car, and I was never one  
Inclined to the romance of driving around.

Besides, I've come to love commuting and  
Its madnesses: the crush of fellow commuters,  
The volatile temper of drivers, the weather.

Perhaps, in other countries, commuting deadens  
The soul. Where I'm from, it breathes life to a day  
Idling away in dim offices filled with gossip.

Out on these streets, no two commutes are ever  
The same. We have the same destinations,  
but we never arrive there quite the same.

Sometimes we're early, sometimes late.  
Once or twice, we'll be on time—  
it's this unpredictability I've come to love.

It's like when you read a poem.  
You can never tell when a line might just  
run on, or when it just ends.

So I remain skeptical of the trains that run  
Across our cities. How monotonous,  
How uneventful the ride. Get on in one station,  
Get off the next one. There is only the one unbroken line.
The End of the World

The world ends over and over again
In cineplexes, on television.

Most of the time it’s our fault:
We’ve become too arrogant;
We play god, create machines,
Pathogens, mutants that kill us.
Other times, Mother Nature itself
Revolts: shifting continents, freezing
Everything over. Or the universe
Sends a hefty asteroid or two our way.

It’s a spectacle, whatever happens. Running
Like ants, crowds are swallowed
Whole by sudden sink-holes or fall
Prey to space creatures, or just the dead
Waking up, looking to feast. Whatever
The means, we eat it up. Wholesale
Devastation, carnage, the madness.

There might be heroes to root for. Average
Family men, loyal housewives, children;
Young lovers on the verge of eloping,
Marriage or estrangement. But we fast-
Forward past their dramas, and cheer
Only when the world starts falling apart
Around them in CG (best seen in IMAX 3D).

It’s an excusable high, the desire for wanton
Destruction, countless spectacular anonymous
Deaths. We aren’t stupid. Some of us have lived
Through enough real disasters and soothsayers’
Predictions to know, most likely, that isn’t the way
We’ll go. If we’re lucky, we’ll die in hospital rooms,
In our sleep, or at home, our hearts giving out
The moment the story on the screen ends.