

Literary Section

FROM “THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ABUNDANCE AND GRACE”

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About the Author

Christine V. Lao was a fellow at the Silliman National Writers Workshop. Her poems have appeared in *Under the Storm: An Anthology of Contemporary Philippine Poetry* and the special literary issue of *Kritika Kultura*. Her stories have been featured in *Philippine Speculative Fiction*; *Philippine Genre Stories*; the *Philippines Free Press*; and the *Philippines Graphic*. She is pursuing an MA in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines.

Author’s Note

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Josephine's Last Farewell

They are burning your books, Pepe.
It is a mistake. A great wind is coming
to feed the fire. The forests are already
aflake with your words.

Your words, the chatter of morning birds
but deeper. In your sleep you named
all the extinct animals of the world
and they came alive.

How long until the city burns, the country
reduced to ash? It is not as you intended.
It is as you intended. There is no comfort
in these thoughts. Nor in the starless horizon

beyond this burning. No comfort
in the shadow that mimics
your overcoat, the crevice where the fatal
bullet is lodged.

This darkness is a straightjacket
A bullet's trajectory, widow's weeds
The costume one chooses to wear
When falling off the map.

How We Met

Tied to my wrist at a party:

A lighthearted airhead

High on helium

I jerked it around

It followed me home

Squeaking gleefully

Overhead

Not yet

This glowering god,

This sullen moon

Gretel

so I strayed
from the aisle
where you'd left me
but left a trail
so if you looked
you would know
I had meant
you to follow
so I crumbled
our cookies
& they dropped
from my pocket
though this
was the grocery
not a forest of crows
still I went hungry
& still I grew cold
as I made my way out
& into the mall
& its stalls oh its stalls
all so brightly lit
& towards the
stall with
the toy cars you loved
to look at, you said,
before they turned
into pumpkins
but it was too late
& I ran

out of crumbs
& by the bakery too
so I took off a shoe
laid it softly aground
pointing toward the house
of gingerbread & sweets
that looked good enough
to eat though it
was only gumpaste
on cardboard & I
was nibbling the roof
when you finally
found me
you & that salesgirl that
damsel in distress was it
she who had called you
back to claim me? But dear silly
Hansel, why are you dressed
like mall security?
Why the rough hands
pushing me out the door?
Now your exit's behind me
now the lock has been turned
now before me the twilight
& its stinking pelt
& beyond the unfathomable
dark.
Why, I say to it,
What big teeth you have.

Swatches

After Shane Carreon, "Deciding on Another Memory"

Choosing the paint to dress our home,
 We spin the color wheel. Blue, bottle-
 Green—I think, Ocean! You say, Sky!—

Red bleeds into orange—Sunset! we agree,
 And so it appears between your roller,
 My brush. The color of a memory:

A hammock by the beach
 Holding our bodies
 The way you now hold my hand.

This, I choose to remember.
 Not the weight of his head on my
 Unmoored shoulder, some other night,

Some other beach;
 Or the self as mere body
 Without conscience or remembrance.

Once there was a skiff that crossed the skyline
 And vanished. Somewhere it is crossing the horizon
 Still.
 Now I've lost my way

With the brush, haven't I?
 Yet here We are here
 You are with me Still

On the shore where the tides have carried me back
 Where you hold me and all the world's colors turn
 Hard and brilliant, jewels in our paint-stained hands.