SAFEHOUSE

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About The Author
Allan Popa is the author of seven collections of poetry, the most recent being Basta (Ateneo Press, 2009). He has received the Philippines Free Press Literary Award and the Manila Critics Circle National Book Award. He earned his MFA in poetry at Washington University in Saint Louis, where he won the Norma Lowry Prize and the Academy of American Poets Graduate Prize. He received fellowships to the New York State Writers Institute at Skidmore College from 2006-2011. He teaches at the Filipino Department of Ateneo de Manila University. His new book of poems titled Laan is due out in 2013.
Feather

Torture is an art
not a sadist's game.

The instruments in the room glow.

My favorite, the lightest:
a bird's feather inserted into
a suspect's piss hole.

I am tickled
when she squirms.
Then comes
the distortion of our faces.

I do the same with the rib
of a coconut palm. I tap it.
Blood comes out.

You ask me how
I know the truth?

There is a certain threshold you
and I cross from opposite directions

when your own blood feels
like the blood of someone else.
Doors

Every night called out
under guard

kept awake kept waiting
even on a night when

Who of us
Who of us has never

pictured herself in never

thought up answers
to questions she might be

In the room I noticed several
identical doors—far
too many for one room.
Pear

The tree withers as I pluck it,
timid inside a fist of leaves.
It turns cold in my hand.
The orchard hums

a sound I keep
hearing away from there
whenever I hold it close to my ear:
a throng of witnesses at the door.

Not yet. Not yet. The leaves
do not reveal the eyes
I think growing
on its skin.

I nurse it. It makes mouth
wherever it touches
flesh: an orifice,
an opening of a wound.

Only liars can taste its succulence.
Your mouth flowers
to birth the true fruit. I wake no
children inside your body.
Clock

Who moves the clock
    hands when I am not

looking? I close my eyes.
    The light bulb still shines.

I wake to the same light
    swinging above
always an hour before
    the appointed time.

Who moves the hands
    approaching the hour?

Who keeps the light on
    in that house with open
windows, a jacket waiting
    for a body in her hands?
Water

As on the eve of a great feast
a parade of informants
descends a steep flight

of stairs to fill a roomful
of earthen jars without spill.

They pour in silence
throughout the night
and still the work isn't done.

Whose thirst is the coming day?
The empty mouths
neck-deep in shadow wait.

The potter who shapes
the void with clay sleeps.

They say a man who drowns
in his dream will wake up
breathing inside a womb.

The deep room floods
with a grief no one can cry out.

I wade through it without
getting wet. I hear you
have nothing to confess but water.
Rose

*Are you prepared to die, Maita?*
I am not Maita, I repeat.

One man is whispering,
the other man is asking questions

I do not answer. The door
slams. The door opens
to make me hear screams
played back. My voice
captured in a loop.
Someone’s sobbing, someone’s
singing, someone’s shouting
her name: voice without body.

One man helps me up.
The other man whispers,

*Here you are going to tell all,*
*and open out like a rose.*