

THE GOD OF SMOKE: TESTIMONIES

Michelle Esquivias
University of the Philippines, Diliman
ellie.esquivias@gmail.com

About the Author

Michelle Esquivias is currently a senior taking up English Studies (Language) in University of the Philippines, Diliman. Her poems have appeared in *The Literary Apprentice*, *Cha*, and *transit*. Her first chapbook, *An Introduction to Vases*, was published last year.

A building is burning. A name
takes flight into the expanse,
stumbling as it tries to become
itself. Against the resistance of
the sky. Basic stowaway education.
Learning the way of combing the clouds
into a home. A star dies out. Those below
call out unknowingly, to what is there
dampening the horizon—no longer
the rain. Overture of departure,
the name is bellowed: *fire, fire*
There is a hesitant quiver
in their cries.

The God of Smoke

Testimonies

Birthday

bowl of wonton noodle hitting
fissure, backroom dirty kitchen.

slit-eye peep at a thurible chain
snapping.

the smack of globe against marble.

a sudden congregation of
hisses at the street corner
tricycle hub.

Yet sometimes with barely a stir I start
past piled leaves petals paper
garbage. Billowing into birth, en route
past unwanted, the immediate
past, as if without knowing, as if
without.

From a growing list of what you call sins

A rolled up piece of paper dwindling to a crisp, when something dies, when something heaves, a tall block of painted cement fraying at the corner. A series of inhalations, trees preventing forest fires, but not always. Hikers' baited breath, vaporous name from their mouths, "civil twilight," the campsite unheeded, until (see *pyrolysis*, separation by fire: actually, see *tribulation*). Housewives doing all the work: combustions by the hour. A burning ship going down in water: a lit cigarette floating along city innards: factory workers mining in the dark—two out of three things reported on the news. But pre-meditated glowing! negligible soundbite of a match hitting the pavement!: a hundred ravages wasted.

Letter from an outsider

We do not dare call it what it is. Instead,
tendrils. Instead, arms. Reaching out to cradle
us in the bustle of the afternoon.
Instead, haze. We only wade through
its embrace because we love what we cannot
escape. Instead, shape. Forming in between
us. Instead, kin. Instead, the thing
we like to take pictures of.