 TURN AND RETURN

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About the Author
Pauline Lacanilao works for an organization that provides food, shelter, medical care, and education to children from indigent communities. Her poems have been published in Kalyani Magazine, Women’s Voices for Change, and the Journal of English and Comparative Literature. She lives in Pasig City, Philippines.
INVISIBLE HINGE

To that which is wired to flick
toes into flight

To the sinew of the foot, quick
to constrict motion to a stop

To the twist of meat
around the biggest bones

cabling the stringy rudder
that swings the body on a hinge

invisible as the decision from which
the switch is born

from which it steps a stutter
of turn and return,

the demented dance of doubt
(or is it defeat, this bowing out?)

Even to the shoe, scuffed
in its holy sprint and jolted spin

each mark, a tick, a tell
betraying the secrets

one holds secret from oneself:
Praises!
Praise the curl of the wave
diving into its own belly

Praise the twirl
of the storm's reckless skirt

Praise the dusted hands of nature
How here we're free to thrash
down the aisle of instinct
where the dialectic is dissolved

into live or die
What else

What else
could possibly reverse

this traveler's trajectory
through the crowded metro

where a familiar face forms
out from the apparition

of a former grief, of a long-gone
grief, of a never-again grief

Surely nothing other than a routine
function of the flesh, surely
LITURGY

I refuse,
as I sit in the pew,
to beg. Above,
a bat circles nothing.

As I sit in the pew,
I daydream:
a bat, circles, nothing.
Will heaven be different?

I daydream
to pass the time. I
will: Heaven, be different.
Truth flickers like a trapped bat.

To pass the time, I
make noise too. Eager
truth flickers. Like a trapped bat,
I hear a voice

make noise. Too eager
to beg. Above,
I hear a voice
I refuse.
HALF THE SKY IS RAINING

A baby wailing at a picnic  
Applause punctuating the starling’s tune

The summer heat is stunned cold  
on this frenzied evening

divided as the mind  
of a woman who wants

to be two odds at once:  
happy and alone

The storm hits the street  
turns to steam and wakes

her to the weight  
of another wind

crashing down to free her  
from this half-raging weather

that wrecks and quenches  
the lawn of a man who, like the rain

is both  
here and not

A shadow and its inverse meeting  
only in the boom and sparkle

the startling balance  
of a dazzling dread.
BUS SLAMS BREAKS.

We on our feet jerk and buckle
knees elbows knuckles collapsing

person into person, bodies clasping
together like begging hands.

I am startled by the softness
of another's joints jigsawed

into mine, jolted by the contours
of her sex pressed against my flesh.

In this awkward orgy
there is warmth.

Her breath, a huff, misplaces itself
on my nape, grips a chord in me

and strums. My skin sings:
Who are you

that this simple violation would awake
a need I never knew? That this

irresistible inertia, would tease
a thirst I thought I'd soothed?

In this aisle, we genuflect
into each other. Stranger,

your body is the temple of God.
Sister, your touch is the answer to prayer.