

LITERARY SECTION

POEMS

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About the Author

Yavana “Naya” S. Valdellon graduated from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2002 with a BFA in Creative Writing and a Dean’s Award for the Arts. She has received fellowships from the University of the Philippines and Dumaguete National Writers’ Workshops, and won the Maningning Miclat Award for Poetry in 2003 and first place in the Carlos Palanca Awards for poetry in English in 2004.

ENCOUNTER

Between car lanes, the woman—
an apparition in polka dots
that have greeted better New Years—

waves at vehicles, as if to unfreeze
their wheels. The stoplight’s
steady eye watches, unmoved,

removed from the traffic of daily drama
enacted on the road. Her hands shake
profanities at passersby and drivers,

who may or may not deserve them.
They pretend not to look as she hooks
thumbs into the garter of her shorts

and crouches down for relief.
No smugness leaks from her face,
just a puddle staining the asphalt

yellow beneath her, refusing erasure.
When she stands, the static of rain falling
dares anyone to applaud.

TAXI MUSIC

It's become a habit, this backseat
sinking, a refrain on cue like swiping out
late. Outside, the highway plays
its nightly chords, other ways to wheel

you home. Taxi rides are grace notes
on clocked weekdays, luxuries you pocket
at overtime's end. Save that sometimes,
your ears pay an unexpected price:

Mellow Touch past midnight, its jingle
older than these streets. *You are the minstrel*
all over again, plucking at memory's
strings. A dashboard tiger, hardly sinister,

bobs its head to some alto's crooning.
No *hi-hos* from the windshield's dwarvish
seven, audience to the driver's off-key
mumbling. On-air strumming turns

streetlights, shanties—even the whole city
and moon notated on a sheet of sky—
into instruments, percussive to your
melodious pain. How suburban, the way

sadness is rerouted, recycled like sighs
from chests to airwaves, pitched
as lullabies for wakeful clichés tuned in
to this station tonight. Too taxing,

to remember who it is you're missing.
A woman belts out someone else's ache
and somewhere, a girl in a house

you just passed, cries herself to sleep

to this same song. No one is beyond
sappiness. Tomorrow, you will work
despite your bass heart's drumming.
Upholstery muffles your solo humming.

SECONDHAND

It was never a question of worth,
Love, of whether we deserve
each other or not. But the change
jangling in our pockets seems
to convince you otherwise.
So let's take a roundabout route,

another swerve. Session Road
is teeming with tourists on the prowl
this summer. We are unashamed
to dress like them, in shades
and sweaters layers too eager.

What we remember of Baguio slopes
on the cliché—your hazy memories
on horseback, my adolescent pining
for strawberry-tasting lips.
Over a decade since the seismic
story, this city has turned into

a secondhand wonderland, a haven
for hagglers. If there's one thing
we both agree on, it's getting
the best deal. So we steal our way
into *ukay-ukay* stalls, rummaging
for the real, for brands that strike us.

Who cares if they belonged to those
now dead, or were sent overseas to bring
others relief? Aren't we also fond
of books on sale, though dog-eared
and thumbprinted? If you think that

was a cheap analogy, here's one
that will make you sneeze in disgust:

we all have histories. Even this city
resists symmetry, having survived
catastrophes. With me, you will
get more than you bargained for—
sleeves a little worn, buttons missing—

but with this package comes a chance
for joy. It was always a matter
of choice, Love, yours. So be careful
what you discard and what you
pay for; you already know regret
sticks to the skin, much like the smell
of another country's mothballs.