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• Solitude Being Alien

Kimberly Alidio

Over an abyss, approach
with discretion, attention, caution
in stealth mode,
in dead wells

My transport is,
I think,
the tech of the poem
left to earth,
Nueva Filipinas
née Extremadura

A regular tomboy-femme cupping a cup
of joe
an attitude that makes you run
despite fatigue, past fatigue, post-fatigue

Women sitting
on cardboard boxes, pink sheets
hover over Tupperware of food
over the aqueduct, under the overpass
they unpack their shoulders, their shoulders
fan out in long arcs thrown back
scores bubble forth into a laughing river

A City bustles, beeps, smells
opens into infinite
negative space, fries meat, spits out
passengers half-asleep next to
phone card hawkers,
moneychangers

It won't let me alone
tries me out to be its niece,
a light-skinned consumptive
from Sta Scholastica,
a man in dingy crinolines,
solitude being alien
to most Filipinos

Somewhere in the lower keys
I wink awake
into the silicon valley
of the Comanches
under the cirrus canopy
over a Costco parking lot at dusk
marked cartons stacked tall
with jarred jellyfish
shrink-wrapped sugarcane
thudding shadows
sheltering the dings
of pedicabs

The people of this planet
dream
a future collapsed
inside me

Author's Note: "Solitude Being Alien" draws its title from sociologist Geoffrey Fowler on Filipina overseas workers in Europe; Fowler is quoted by Luis Francia in his article, "In Search of the Tadtarin" *Philippine Inquirer*, August 18, 2010. This poem also refers to lesser-used eighteenth-century names for the territory that is currently Texas, USA and northern Mexico. It borrows phrases written by Yael Villafranca, Italo Calvino, Ocean Vuong, and Carl Sagan. This poem will be published as part of a manuscript of the same title by Dancing Girl Press.

• I Was a Twenty-Four-Year-Old Separatist

Kimberly Alidio

1.

I found a book published in 1925 on a city.

In 1994, I took a train to that city.

I took the book out when I got to the city.

I followed the map in the book's inside flap to make my way

From the train station to a university where I found more books on the city.

I made copies.

After four hours, I left the city.

Four years later, I returned in a moving truck.

I carried a 1998 map.

I put it on a kitchen wall and marked places that existed in 1925.

Dots ringed downtown.

Now the northwest corner of the United Center

Now a vacant lot

Now the Kennedy Expressway

Now the Kruger Gallery next to the Frontera Grill.

(In 1947: the Metallic Letter Company.)

Now a biomedical lab at Pritzker Medical School

Now a People's Auto Parking garage

2.

I dotted the north-south city streets following the local train

To hotels, restaurants and private homes.

Seven days a week. Sometimes you take your book and try to read

On the elevated. You read or you fall down, sleepy.

In 1917, two pensionados lived here

Each going to a YMCA Christmas dinner.

One went to Hamilton College of Law

And the other to UIUC.

This address shows up in the Filipino Employment Agency Files from 1929 to 1932

The membership rolls of the Big Visayan club

The attendees of the Postal Club dance

And the Hines Circle Dance in 1931.

Someone who lived here answered a survey

By Mixon and Noss in 1932 or 1933.

In 1944, this address was shared by two couples.

Impossible to get evidence concerning nature

Of dancing as white person is conspicuous.

The anonymous person is essentially

A non-moral person.

3.

The city archivist said

You'll find the Lithuanian social-realist artist Ben Shahn here but none of your kind.

I'm telling you twice.

100 Phillipinos at the New American #2 October 10
50 Phillipinos at the New American #2 October 11
3 Phillipinos at the Madison-Ashland October 11
10 Phillipinos at the New American #2 October 12
20 Phillipinos at the Empire October 12
5 Phillipinos at the Colonial October 12
150 Phillipinos at the New American #2 October 13
90 Phillipinos at the Plaza June 22
80 Phillipinos at the Mayfair June 16
100 Orientals and Phillipinos at the Mayfair June 25
65 Phillipinos and Japanese at the Mayfair July 14
85 Phillipinos at the Mayfair August 8
75 Phillipinos at the Mayfair October 13
75 Phillipinos at the Plaza August 4
67 Phillipinos at the Plaza August 18
85 Phillipinos at the Plaza October 13
85 Phillipinos at the Plaza January 5
95 Phillipinos at the Plaza January 24
70 Phillipinos at the Plaza February 16
50 Phillipinos and Japanese at the Mayfair February 17

4.

The owner of a poolroom and barbershop

Interrupted.

| *Let me ask you something*

Before I tell you that.

Just what is it you are doing?

I want to know first:

Are you going to publish anything?

After the libraries closed, I went to new friends' houses

To talk about what was going on in the city.

I looked at their maps of the elevated pinned to their

Kitchen walls and traced how I followed the 1925 local

To the same place.

If I am to really understand what they have to face

I must be able to see things through their eyes.

To do this I must know good and bad,

Ride the elevators where they work,

See how the bus boy is treated,

Go into the basement of the post office and live

That world for a time, visit their rooms, you see.

5.

I cross-referenced a city historical file with a box

On someone's kitchen table.

Where a name and address appears is someone's old attic.

One couple did domestic work together.

Their names are a number funneled into a larger statistic.

The scent of the elevated from attic to archive is too impatient.

28 organizations
28 intramarriages
500 intermarriages
2 dance halls
6 social clubs
3 tennis clubs
4 musical clubs
4 dry cleaners
2 restaurants
6 barbershops
2 pool halls
3 newspapers
2 apartment houses
1 grocery store
3 tailor shops
2 radio stores
1 photograph studio

I copied charters and constitutions for a floating micro-city

Of absentees.

6.

Above where Madigan's used to be

Four couples and three children, 1934-6.

In 1935, one of the men and two children

Were requested to be repatriated

By the man's father

Who was in the Philippines.

I tried to date the best friends of the women I dated.

I tried to date a best friend but she was too familiar.

I counted the bars I hung out in and memorized their

Names and addresses.

Very seldom is one of them asked to a good home.

The woman who kept the box on her kitchen table

Called my days full of leisure.

The landlord raised the rent.

I closed my boxes into a hatchback and left the city.

Author's Note: "I Was a Twenty-Four-Year-Old Separatist" appeared in *Horse Less Press Review*. It refers to pre-World War II *pensionados* — Filipinos funded by the U.S. colonial government to attend American post-secondary educational institutions. It lists names of taxi-dance halls, and it quotes from the following: (1) Estrella Alamar's interview with Mateo and Mary Vergara, August 31, 1979; Filipino American Historical Society of Chicago; (2) Paul G. Cressey, "A Comparison of the Roles of the 'Sociological Stranger,'" *Urban Life* 12: no. 1 (1983, originally written 1932): 111; and (3) John L. Mixon, Interview with Bartolomé Nicolas, October 23, 1932 housed at University of Chicago Theological Seminary. This poem will be published as part of a manuscript, *Solitude Being Alien*, by Dancing Girl Press.

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