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In This Ride Home

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Sarili ang indak,
 Ang sarili *ang*
 Awit—

Sariling mamúmulaklák sa lamat-salamin—

At tutupok din sa putíng-balát
 At nagkalat na pasintabing
 Putúl-putól,
 Ambág, ng ligáw na *kahapon*—

Ariin, O aking kasiping, talas-
 Ágilá
 Sa malayong pagtanáw,

At, sa pagsilay/paglahò
 Ng kulay-sari-sari—
 Ang
 Humigit/kumulang na limós
 Ay silangan ng lahi.

VINCENZ SERRANO

In This Ride Home

I wish I could tell you what's really on my mind.
 Something like: I got a 60 in Math last quarter
 and I'm ashamed. Something like: Butch is teasing

me bad and I just smile and shrug it off,
 but it really hurts. But no, in this ride home
 with you, I've kept mostly quiet, I've plugged

myself up, like that boy in the story who kept
 his finger in the dike's hole all night, stopping
 the sea from breaking open the wall. You start

to say something—how hard Venn diagrams are—
and the seawall of my silence shows signs
of cracking, the words beginning to trickle:

really hard, I hope Fr. Macayan goes easy on
the quiz tomorrow. Still, after I answer,
nothing happens: the breakwater of quiet

holds back the rest of the roiling sea of thoughts.
Wordlessly, your driver shifts gears, turns
the wheel, throws the lights on high beam,

and wordlessly, we look out separate windows:
rush of cars on your side, rush of pedestrians
on mine. Neon lights pulse their pleas to the sky.

Windshield and windows keep the din out: flower
sellers, trucks, commuters, cars, policemen.
A bus blares at a man crossing its path and I

become aware once more of what bugs me.
I drown in the backwash of my mind. I'm flooded
with things to say: can you help me in Math?

Can you be a friend to me? It's hard to grow up
with failing marks instead of friends. We look
at each other briefly, poised as if to say something

more, but the moment passes, like the glint of passing
headlights caught in your eye: a sudden distant
lighthouse flash, showing the way for a while,

and then vanishing. I shift in my seat as you resume
gazing out the window. Part of me wants to break
the silence: to urge my silent seawall to release

a language of lament long held back. Another part
derides, thinks me foolish to expect anything here,
warns me to say nothing more—after all,

this is simply a lift like others before,
others to come, no counseling session here, no
crisis hotline, no lifeboat thrown to save the drowning.

So nothing happens: only silence for the rest
of the ride, like the quiet shipwrecked sailors share
when food, water, and words have ran out.

What a trip this has turned out to be: the hum
of engine the only music soothing the lack
of speech, the mumble of ads, license plates,

and road signs taking the place of conversation.
I find solace instead in the sight of buildings,
overpasses, taillights, speed. Nothing happens.

I get off at Ayala, you head home to Parañaque,
we bid each other goodbye: see you tomorrow,
thanks for the ride, study for our quiz. Your door

shuts tight on the last of my syllables. End of story,
end of the road. As I walk to the jeepney stop,
I feel like the sea on an empty beach: ceaselessly

repeating to itself its wash of words, the sea shattering
to shore, to no one; the same stories over and over:
waves rushing into wide open ears of coves.

RAMÓN C. SUNICO

Para sa Iyo

(Para kay P.)

Natanggap ko ang iyong liham
malayo kong kaibigan
isinilid sa sobrang
binalot sa kalungkutan.