



THE ACHIEVE OF, THE MASTERY

Filipino Poetry and Verse from English, mid-'90s to 2016

The Sequel to *A HABIT OF SHORES*

VOLUME II

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Present

I stretch beside a bed
too big for one, heat water twice
to stand longer by the counter,
sweep the floor and step
on strands of hair
that cling to the broom, mop the floor,
fold his shirts, fingers pinching
the fabric to define the lines,
rearrange the furniture—
desk now by the window;
no need to flick the lights on
in afternoons pretending
to read or write, observing shadows
pass over the wood, the sheet
and consume the pencil;
my back away from the door he'll unlock.

He'll hold me. I'll lose
the need to tell him
soot was scrubbed out; there
on the rug he bought, I slipped.

Hands

This is how they say you keep a thing close
with the hands: Cup them as if to scoop water
to wash your face. Fingers press
against each other to have it whole.
A hand can hold so much:

the jutting bones of the shoulder
blade and collar, the neck, a warmth
fading out until there is only pulse, the rhythm
specific to the motions, the time, the place. Perceptible
owing to the pauses. I count the beats

per minute. Just as I count the times the knife
hits the board as I dice onions when I can't
see, eyes welling with tears. The sting urging
me to rub them. Wipe the burn off
even as the eyes feel torn by bone or skin.

The knife crashes, bounces from board
to counter. I stretch my fingers, feel sweat rise
onto the folds in between, before
I curl them in.