



**Vincen Gregory Yu**

# The End of Dementia





POETRY

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When we speak of the moon,  
we believe in the absence of gravity.

A small house hovers  
inches from lunar soil.

All around, craters flecked with rocks  
billions of years older than us.

We see the stars on a sky  
that no longer burns with color

when the sun rises and sets.  
We name them, one by one,

with terrestrial names we speak  
on a daily basis. Names of plants,

places, old friends whose faces  
we don't have to remember.

This is the end  
of dementia. Our memories

immortal, our brains immune  
to atrophy, breath

an artifact of our former lives.  
Imagine living

where everything is new.  
Or some version of new.

Sound of heavy feet in space,  
light of the far earth,

waxing and waning on its own axis.  
The cosmic pull of the ground

something we can ignore.



## The Vanished Sister

Bright night on my porch, two pinpoints dangle  
just above the stretch of hills in the distance.

Castor and Pollux. Brothers of ancient myth—  
one mortal, one divine—who came into this world

by way of an egg. But provenance is not the point.  
What matters is the manner of departure.

How we know for a fact one brother never died  
a mortal, how the mortal died and was made divine.

The old astronomers could always find them  
on the dark dome of sky, trace with their fingers

the order of the stars. I think about this  
a lot, now that my baby slumbers and wakes

against my body, our clocks at constant odds.  
And I wonder: Does she ever dream

of the sister she consumed in my womb?  
Science says there will always be vanishing twins,

but tells us little of how they vanish. Aberrations  
of the mother's genes, perhaps. Or they melt

into blood with the slightest insult, which is to say,  
it's always the mother's fault. *You don't deserve*





*another baby*. When I saw for the first time  
two beating hearts in my sonogram, I felt my own

leap with a joy I had never known, like the world  
in all its radiant beauty had been handed to me.

Brief bliss. On my next doctor's visit,  
I was told there was a chance I'd still see

my other child. Sometimes, the disappeared  
are not entirely gone; they enter this world

as *Fetus papyraceus*, flattened remnants glued  
like white parchment to their sibling's placenta.

Is that where the clues are written—on filmy paper?  
It never mattered: My daughter, the one dreaming

in her bassinet, came into this world on her own.  
What came before, I've long known:

In the wet darkness of my body, she made a pact  
with her sister. One became a mortal, the other

instantly divine. Consumed by primeval greed,  
she ate her twin. She knew the only way

to win her mother's absolute attention  
long before she knew her mother's face.

If I look into her eyes now, long enough  
and hard enough, I might just glimpse

my vanished daughter, ageless, loveless,  
her winking reflection a blinding supernova.





# Christian Girl

*After the painting "Back of the Beach" by Karen Kraco*

*Find a good Christian girl, Daddy said.  
Someone to pray with, someone good*

*enough. You sit on eggshell sand  
next to the lake, skateboard in hand,*

*praying nobody knows you. No bearded men  
pinned to wooden crosses counting*

*your sins, only men stealing glances  
at the curious sight of you, all black*

*in a sea of bare chests and backs  
baking in the midday sun. Someone taps*

*your shoulder, says, I like a boy who skates,  
lets his hand linger on your drenched shirt*

*long enough to leave a fleeting, stellate imprint.  
You do not move. You've always been good*

*with strangers, but now you hear  
Daddy's voice not far behind you.*

*Have you seen this boy, he asks,  
harsh rumble of his tongue so familiar*

*your heart springs in panicked beats.  
So you disappear. Shorn of shirt*



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POETRY

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and skateboard, you're just a boy  
like any other. You test the water

with your toes. You let the breeze  
nuzzle your face. You pass the day

on a shoddy boat, the sky in your eyes  
slowly turning gold, slowly dimming.



# Angry Christ

Alfonso Ossorio (c. 1950)

“The centerpiece of the [St. Joseph the Worker] chapel, the 60-square-meter liturgical mural [‘The Last Judgment’ or ‘The Angry Christ’] features an image of a frowning Jesus with a large flaming heart and outstretched arms, his feet crushing the serpentine Lucifer. It occupies the sanctuary wall and ceiling and has been a mystery to the faithful since it was finished in 1950.”

—*Philippine Daily Inquirer*

I am sixteen, sprawled on the grassy field, a comet crawling across the starry canvas of an April sky. Alfonso lends me his binoculars, while he points at a constellation I can't name. *Here*, he says, *Orion's belt*. He unbuckles his belt, and the sting of Father's buckle comes to me. On my thigh is a fading welt unkissed by sunshine or gentle rain. On the corners of Alfonso's mouth, a smile fades into the harsh landscape of a stranger's face. He tells me about the unfinished painting in the chapel: a man with a furrowed brow, a phallic dove, a flaming heart framed by scarlet hands. The Father's hands, he says, their coarse lines thick with certainty. I trace the lines on his palms, his fingers entwined with those of a brown-skinned boy. *Let's go back inside*, he says, and I picture the hallowed bird diving straight for our skulls. When Alfonso says, *turn around*, beads of sweat inching down his cheeks, his neck and torso, and the trail of hair below his bulging navel, I see only the man with the furrowed brow on the sanctuary wall. I pray for a longer night. I pray it never rains smoldering rocks from space. I pray the heavens hold, forever and ever.





## Bruised Fruit

In this memory, I am looking for fruit  
on a carpet of trilliums and mango leaves.  
A splinter clings to a crease on my thumb,  
a praying mantis on the rolled-up hem  
of my pants. Already, it is midday,  
the canopy ringing with the caws  
of camouflaged birds. Already, this heat  
pricks at my skin, reminds me of a melody  
in B minor my father loved so much.  
Somewhere a diver recovers a bronze chest  
dressed in barnacles at the bottom  
of the ocean. Rising to the surface,  
he discovers he no longer sees the sky,  
somber violet and speckled  
with constellations. He discovers  
the absence of hearing. Already, it is midnight,  
the fish have dispersed, the clouds  
a darker shade of indigo, the forest floor  
hushed by the grief of one who has settled  
for bruised and splattered fruit.





## Seine at Dusk

There's a bird migration sweeping  
across the river's still surface, echo  
of a thousand beating specks, feathers  
akimbo in this brief, sunset rush.

Dot by dot this alien trail flows  
straight out of Seurat, this burst  
of color too strange, too sudden  
even for a volatile world

such as ours. Such as the one  
I think of, when I think of us,  
arms and legs on a blanket of grass,  
clothes heaped on a mound

above our heads, imagining the thrill  
that must come with untethered wings.  
In the dimming ether, everything  
assumes a single shape, dying stars

among fireflies, pinions, and leaves.  
Gives us reason to believe we have  
all the time in the world, and the world  
is everything that lies between the sky

and the river, and everything the river  
touches forgets there is even the sky,  
which is to say, how easily we miss  
the point of all this flying.

