

BILUGIN ANG ULO

I wanted to say it myself
hey, your house is burning
where are you going with that toothpick
what good will that do
hey, smoke, I smell smoke
at least save the cat
on these occasions the most
practical thing you can do
is also the most obvious
the egg beaters can't help you
or your collection of Dolly Parton
records from the 80s
hey, the walls are charring as we speak
maybe we should love maybe
we should go while we can still walk
no I won't have a cup of tea
no no coffee no thank you
sure tell me a tale
it might take my mind off
the smell of things burning all around me

Filipino idiom meaning to make fun of (literally, make the head round)

BASAG ULO

cracks had already been appearing
fissured like the earth
suspicious of happiness

the lack left us cold
every morning the air filled us
oxygen sparking in our veins

every street full of *remember whens*
the night the tower exploded
a fiery welcome

we could begin again but we won't
it does not last
might as well keep a raindrop
in your hands

Filipino idiom meaning quarrel (literally, broken head)

BUHAY ALAMANG PAG LUKSO'Y PATAY

Don't know how I managed it, who I have to thank, the bank of luck, of benevolent gods and ancestors watching over me, letting me withdraw as much as I want, as much as I deserve, which isn't much, being a product of circumstances and society, of crushing piety, and my credit isn't good, could be better, is improving all the time. The queues are long but part for me, when I need them to, and I need them to, constantly. Often. I need to see the manager, maybe for a loan, an advance, something advantageous for the next twelve months, when we find out how the pendulum swings like a blade to cut and cut and cut.

Filipino idiom meaning one who lives an uncertain life (literally, shrimp's life – when it leaps, it's dead)

BIGAY-KAYA

the tingling sting on my tongue
hot surprise chilli flake burn
you bring a dowry of yourself saving
a hope chest of promises
we wake up to whiteness
when snow covered our land
and every edge we can see
white as mothballs
close as a cedar chest of hope
drove around Europe looking for a toilet
and I was holding it in
every colour but white on the walls
a welcome hit of salt
a taste of patatas bravas
how much is this worth
how much have you put by
nothing a white dress couldn't teach
what did we know when we started
nothing a silver ring couldn't reach
encircle and embrace
face to face hand to hand
here's a gold coin for your trouble
all I can afford

Filipino idiom meaning dowry (literally, give what you can)

BINILI ANG TINDA

when I disconnect my lie detector
for you my happiness index swings
up up up all you say
I could inscribe on my hand
on my heart
either one will do at this stage
I did that for years or months
we hide what we buy
and the interest mounts
this morning
fog turned the air milky
mid-winter
it's been months
since everything
stopped by it's time to switch
this machine
see that needle swing once more

Filipino idiom meaning believed everything (literally, bought the store)

BIGAY-LOOB

everyday I can't remember the details of how we got here
we will soon be apart with a final stroke it is apparent
we broke our promise though we tried through every premise
presented to us it was only the last bullet through us
we couldn't stop with our bare hands couldn't adopt
a new way a new frame of reference the pictures hung true
when I take them down one by one every possession
a reminder attached to a memory an emotion a notion
one day I stopped making sense our world nonsensical
blackness in our days months decades leapt ahead
when I want every moment to belong to me and maybe
if the leaving were to happen slowly enough we won't
notice we won't see or feel how it hurts the core of us

Filipino idiom meaning something given to please (literally, give inside)

BATO SA LANSANGAN

stab me once with a pencil point
and now I have a tattoo the years
connect us dot to dot there aren't
that many pictures of us I notice
and that's deliberate the first time
I was alone everything scared me
the garage hollow with echoes
I locked the doors double checked
my situation everything impending
peace elusive waiting to heal
I formed a blister then popped it.

Filipino idiom meaning useless person (literally, stone in the street)

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Ivy Alvarez's poetry collections include *The Everyday English Dictionary*, *Disturbance*, and *Mortal*. Her latest is *Diaspora: Volume L* (Paloma Press, 2019). A Fellow of MacDowell Colony (US), and Hawthornden (UK), her work is widely published and anthologised (twice in *Best Australian Poems*), with poems translated into Russian, Spanish, Japanese and Korean. Born in the Philippines and raised in Australia, she lived in Wales for almost a decade, before arriving in New Zealand in 2014.

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