

CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION 2017/18

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The Night Shift

It was my first day on the job. I made the sign of the cross with my sweaty fingers, letting the December drizzle wash over my face. Dalisay and Jose were at home, asleep with little idea of what their Mama was up to. Yet this job was for them. It would fetch the 10,000 pesos needed to pay for their schooling. For a better life. That's why I took the night shift.

Feeling a tap on my shoulder, I wheeled around expecting an assailant or even worse, the police. I found myself looking up at Bagwis. Bagwis had done this job before but he was as kind as a dog. Like me, he needed the money. There was a bounty on our city's addicts and now, ordinary people like us were guns-for-hire. Hesitantly, I clambered onto Bagwis' rickety scooter and pulled my black hood over my head. We moved through the night like shadows. At this time, the world's most densely-populated city was a ghost town. The once-busy food-carts were abandoned; packs of mongrels roamed the streets like soldiers.

I was snapped out of my thoughts when the bike skidded to a halt.

"Where are we?"

"San Andres."

I looked around. Dilapidated shacks stood on all sides, crammed together like a Monday traffic jam. Inside them, someone waited to die. We walked down a narrow alleyway, our feet crunching on empty plastic bottles and trash. A solitary streetlight illuminated shapeless mounds, the homeless huddled under their rags. We made our way to the Wayawan Sisig shack. "He comes here every night", said Bagwis. "Calls himself Santos." We sat down, nervously fingering the pistols in our pockets. Who was this man I would aim my gun at? Did he abandon his family for drugs, like my husband did all those years ago? Thoughts coursed through my mind. Then I heard a click.

I looked up, anticipating a pitiless barrel. Instead, I saw a skeletal figure wearing a Marcos campaign T-shirt, his face hidden by the smoke that swathed the room. He repeatedly clicked his cigarette lighter, desperately hoping for a flash of orange. "We have our man", whispered Bagwis. I took a deep breath and aimed.

Then man wheeled around and I saw his face. He was older and more scarred than when I saw him last, but he was my husband alright. I gasped. He could only stare back. He still had his crop of jet-black hair, and his eyes were still that warm shade of chocolate.

Before I could react, the shack was rocked by a BOOM. Bagwis had fired and like a wilting leaf, my husband had crumpled to the floor. For a fleeting second, his eyes stared intently into mine. Then they were out of focus and he was gone. I turned and fled blindly into the narrow alleyway, shaking uncontrollably. From somewhere behind me, I heard Bagwis call my name. I turned and ran towards the scooter.

The night shift was over.