

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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## **The Last Page Tourist**

Conchita Cruz

*Philippine Studies* vol. 53, no. 2&3 (2005): 371

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## CONCHITINA CRUZ

**The Last Page**

Her mother looks at the woman's body and sees graffiti on the side of a train. *What has he done to you?* she asks, wincing at the tattoos, the dragon draped across her shoulder, the Last Supper sprawled on her stomach, the halo around the halo of her navel. Her mother doesn't ask *what will you do now that he is dead*—she wonders instead how to undo the traces of the lover's needle and ink on the woman's body, she wants to know how her daughter can be un-touched. I look up from the last page, right before the woman speaks, and think of your mother, walking toward me after the terrible call, after each number going dark in the elevator and the long walk down a hollow corridor. *She looks different* is all she can bear to say, and I take her word for it. I don't peel myself off the bench outside your door. I am unable to take one last look at you. Who can blame the mother who bargains for the daughter she had on page one, the woman prior to the heroine and her grotesque body, infected by epiphanies? Weeks later, we find ways to pass time—your mother wipes all the furniture in her house with wood polish, willing every surface to shine, and over coffee, I listen to a long-lost friend lament the end of another relationship. The tattooed woman leans against a mirror, or she looks her mother in the eye, or she surveys the view from the window. What does she say when she opens her mouth right before the story ends—I don't know, she must say in plain yet eloquent terms that she is beyond retrieval, and I won't have any of it. My friend knows nothing of my grief, and I console her with stories of your sordid affairs, I judge you without mercy as if you were still here, on the other end of the phone, on the verge of a word I refuse to hear because I must say, again and again, *snap out of it, you're too good for him, please get a hold of yourself.*

## **Tourist**

When we enter the new house, I can't see my mother's face. I follow the folds of her orange dress, follow her feet in soft sandals.

Look, she says to the shadows in a mirror. Hello there, I wave. I don't want to be lost.

Blue means kitchen, white means bedroom. I memorize the colors of floors.

The glass doors lead to the terrace, the terrace leads to the backyard. In the backyard, there are trees. *There will be trees*, she corrects herself.

There is a lady dancing on a cracked blue plate. A withered spider on the carpet. A piano with a full set of yellowed teeth.

Of course, there are rules. No hiding in the closet. No pounding of doors in the middle of the night.

Once you enter the new house, you aren't anywhere else. The noise from outside stays there. My mother must be smiling to herself.

I can't really tell. I tiptoe behind her, stare at the buttons scaling her back.

**MA. ASSUNTA C. CUYEGKENG**

## **Si Maria, sa Paanan ng Krus**

Nangingintab ang banát mong laman.

Tumatahip ang iyong dibdib.

Bakat na ang iyong tadyang  
sa paghigop ng hangin.

At wala akong magawa kundi tumingin.

Wala na ang sanggol na aking kinumutan,

Wala na ang batang pinagsabihan,