

## BELEN, SANTUARIO DE SAN ANTONIO

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*Antonio Jocson*

Angels the size of teacups hover in white tulle  
made to resemble a star cascading on a manger.

Some carry harps while others unscroll banners.  
They are said to be singing, but who hears them?

They are mute as Sundays, and look just as tired.  
From their perches they watch the gathering brocade

of traffic below. Shepherds. Mules. Men in robes.  
And if that weren't enough, the straw is messy.

They have no rest, these angels. I have the feeling  
their wings ache, and they want to tell these people:

Get on with it. And yet it seems they are starved  
for innocence, which is why they can wait without

the least squawk or humiliation—as in Manila,  
just around the corner from the Peninsula, where,

near midnight, the hookers come out. Their heels  
flash along a brief turf of sidewalk. They coax

their lips at anyone. They want to talk. They know  
that beauty is not only inevitable like suffering,

but necessary also. Which is why the grandest stars  
aren't real any longer. Mere Yuletide decoration

along Ayala Avenue. The richest currency is light:  
speechless, unshattered. Reds yellows blues.