

mahal beloved

Issue 2 • July 2021



# Marías at Sampaguitas

# Marías at Sampaguitas

Issue 2, July 2021

## Mahal Who We Are, What It Cost Us, and How We Love

Cover Art  
**MAHAL KITA**  
Sam Lim-Varquez

Sam (he/they) is a Filipino-American university student and freelance illustrator who mostly works in character illustration and sequential art. They find the most joy in using bold color palettes and romantic symbolism.

## Pagsulat sa mga bulaklak Writing on flowers

MARIAS AT SAMPAGUITAS is an online literary magazine whose aim is to highlight voices of the under-resourced and underrepresented, such as the Black, Indigenous, POC, LGBTQIA+ communities, all marginalized genders, and everyone in between.

We honor our **Filipina/x roots**. Our name is Tagalog for “girls and flowers.”

Flowers are gentle and fragile, yet convey certain emotions and messages, depending on its species. These same flowers can grow where other flora are unable.

We strive to be an **intersectionally feminist and womanist, inclusive** publication. We accept work from everyone from all backgrounds, and we prioritize Black, Indigenous, and POC artists of all genders. We do our best to consciously discourage hegemonic narratives; hierarchical structures; and supremacist, assimilationist, and normative messaging.

We aim to be a **safe literary and linguistic space**. We welcome submissions in non-English languages (although to uphold accessibility, we ask for English translations provided for all non-English work). In particular, we encourage non-Tagalog Philippine languages including but not limited to: Ilokano, Bikol, Pangasinense, Waray, Cebuano, etc.

We acknowledge the **ethnolinguistic diversity** of the Philippines. We believe that all identifier terms for Filipino/a/x people are valid, including but not limited to: Filipino, Pinoy, Pinay, Pin@y, Pilipino, Pilipinx, Fil-Am, Fil-Aus, Fil-Can, Philo, Filipinx, and ethnolinguistic groups, such as Bikolano/a/x, Ilokano/a/x, Cebuano/a/x, etc.

We **support Indigenous rights** and representation. We encourage both non-Filipino/a/x and Filipino/a/x readers to learn more about the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines.

# Masthead

## Founder & Editor-in-Chief

**Keana Aguila Labra** (they/she) is a Best-of-Net nominated Cebuana Tagalog Filipinx poet, writer, and editor in diaspora residing on stolen Ohlone Tamyen land. They hope to foster a creative safe space for under-resourced and underrepresented communities with their online magazine, *Marías at Sampaguitas*. They're the author of *Natalie* (Nightingale & Sparrow, 2020) and *No Saints* (Lazy Adventurer Press, 2020).

## General Editor

**Maria Bolaños** (she/her) is a Filipina-American poet and book reviewer and is committed to building spaces to nurture and showcase Filipinx literature as well as Black, Indigenous, and POC literature. Her most recent poetry focuses on Fil-Am diaspora culture, and on retelling Philippine myths. Her writing has been featured in *Touchstone*, *Antigone*, *Chopsticks Alley*, and the *International Examiner*, among others. Maria lives on the stolen Tongva land, Tovaangar. She writes poetry, essays, and book reviews on her Instagram, @mariabeewrites.

## Issue Editor

**Dina Klarisse** (she/her) is a writer and poet living in the Bay Area. She uses words to explore/try to make sense of her experience as a queer Filipina American immigrant and recovering Catholic, as well as her interest in the intersections of history, language, culture, and identity. Her work has been published in ASU's *Canyon Voices*, *The Daily Drunk Mag*, *Chopsticks Alley*, *Kalopsia Literary Journal*, and Emerging Arts Professionals SFBA. More of her writing can be found on her Instagram @hella\_going and blog [www.hellagoing.com](http://www.hellagoing.com).

## Poetry Editor

**Kathy Mak** (she/her) an emerging writer based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared/are forthcoming in *The /tEmz/Review*, *Marías at Sampaguitas*, and *Kissing Dynamite*. She writes to reflect on her experiences, and to explore the unbounded.

## Creative Writing Editor

**Morgan Russell** (she/they) is the Creative Writing Editor for *Marías at Sampaguitas*. When she's not waxing lyrical about the importance of storytelling, she writes poetry that can be found in *Rabid Oak*, *Empty House Press*, *Apricity Press*, *The Rush*, and *mutiny!*. She is on Twitter @conniptionns.

## Art Editor

**Hal Saga** (they/them) is currently a student at California State University, Fullerton getting their Bachelor's degrees in Ethnic Studies and Cinema & Television Arts. Being Filipinx themselves, Saga dedicates their time to learning more about their heritage and history to pass onto future generations through art and film. Alongside being an Art Editor for *Marías*, they are a social media manager for *Kissing Dynamite Poetry*, a breaking news reporter for *TV Wasteland*, was a nominee in film editing for *OC Register* Artist of the Year 2020, and is a flying bison (Go Appa!) connoisseur.

## Social Media Editor

**Kelly Ritter** (she/they) is a reader, writer, & crafter currently living life in Muncie, Indiana. She recently graduated from Ball State University with a Bachelor of Arts in English & a minor in Creative Writing. When she's not reading or tweeting, she's outside practicing yoga or cuddling her kitties.



# Our Thanks To

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# Love Letter from the Editors

Dear *Marías at Sampaguitas* Reader:

Kumusta ka? We hope you're reading this in safety and gentleness.

The creation of this issue, MAHAL, was no easy task.

When *Marías* first called out for submissions for this issue in October 2020, during Filipino/a/x American History Month, the United States was already about eight months into pandemic mode. We were deep into devastation of once-in-a-century magnitude. Yet we never could have predicted that in the days, weeks, and months to follow, we would be faced with still more horrors that would shake us to our core.

Our kababayan in the Philippines were hit by Typhoon Ulysses, on top of the other typhoons that had devastated the country. Here in the United States, the very existence of the government was threatened when white supremacists stormed the Capitol just days into the New Year. New strains of COVID-19 emerged and threw country after country into fresh chaos. Hate towards the Asian community erupted across the world. In Atlanta, a white gunman murdered Asian American women. And we continued to lose Black and Brown lives to police brutality. At the time of writing this letter, we are feeling sickened and helpless as we follow the barrage of news stories covering Israel's bloody attacks on Palestine, in an unrelenting, multi-day bombing of Gaza. Our hearts go out to the lives lost.

Almost a year passed since that October call for submissions, and our hearts have been so weary. How could we hope to release our little issue in the face of these world-stopping challenges? Is there still a space for what this issue has to say?

Time and again, we needed to sit by ourselves and hold these questions heavy in our hands. We listened, in the quiet. And we saw, despite everything:

Love persisted.

We learned how to use the internet to mobilize grassroots efforts and give mutual aid to grief- and disaster-stricken communities. We saw the Black vote triumph against odds, against history, and turn Georgia blue to clinch the election and end 45's tyranny. We saw the start of COVID vaccination (and we continue to call for distributing the vaccine equitably all over the world). George Floyd's murderer was duly convicted. Asian communities gathered closer to one another; we held each other in our grief; and we insisted on resisting hate and celebrating ourselves in our art, our poetry, our music, our films, our talents, our cultures.

Love persists, we persist.

Reader, we continue to live in a harrowing time. We continue to shoulder burdens, the very real consequences of death from incompetencies and transgressions of government structures around the world. There continues to be loss.

It isn't easy to create in perpetuating duress, so we owe a great amount of thanks to the creatives who submitted and chose to keep their pieces in this issue. We also owe a deep thanks to the staff and contracted artists of *Marías at Sampaguitas* for your friendship, your presence, and your devotion to our work.

This issue is called MAHAL because this is our collective offering of love to our readers and our community. And after so many challenges behind the scenes for our staff, this issue is also our reminder to ourselves that we must insist upon love.

Thank you for trusting us with your work. Thank you for sharing beauty when we need it most.

Be safe. Take care of yourself and each other.

With gratitude, solidarity, and endless pagmamahal,

Keana, Maria, Dina, Kathy, Morgan, Hal, and Kelly  
*The Editors*



# MAHAL

Who We Are,  
What It Cost Us,  
and How We Love



MARÍAS AT SAMPAGUITAS

*This was the planned, original cover for the Mahal issue. Due to extenuating circumstances, we've used different artwork for the cover. In respect to Hizon's work, we're including it in this issue.*

**Kate Hizon** enjoys conveying stories through graphic design. Her free time is spent watering plants, winning family mahjong night, and over-organizing her music playlists. She can be contacted at [eggcheeked@gmail.com](mailto:eggcheeked@gmail.com)

## In the Beginning

Billimarie Lubiano Robinson

Everything has its intricate beginning.

Everything except for birth.

When people ask me how many weeks I am, I tell them two answers:

“Eighteen from conception. The medical industry wants me to say twenty.”

We are trained to be unsure of our own conceptions, to leave it in the hands of a profitable industry. It is an example of some other force authoring a contrived and safe narrative for our bodies, like a script that is assigned to us—one we had no hand in writing. I fight back against this conditioning in small ways, like giving different dates of my last menstrual period when asked. I watch with a wry smile on my face as professionals plug lies into their machines, then read the wrong answers back to me. There is an undercurrent to this spirit. As I take joy in rebelling in small and playful ways—like asking obnoxiously why a waiting room filled with pregnant women does not offer healthy snacks—I present to you the real beginning, a departure from the stale tales we have been forced to chew. This is a return to a truth that belongs to the body, the spirit, the heart, and the black brown dirt of this Earth—

You came to me like a vibrant wind along the shore.

It would be wrong to say I was not expecting you; right to say I was not entirely conscious of your season.

Of course there were signs.

There were signs in the early days: the call to visit spiraling cities by the sea, a remembrance of all things coral white and deep blue. Collecting sea shells like a song. Each intricate twig and stone, gifts from the flow of rivers and trees.

I think you're awake, now. I know this because it is 3AM: the time you take to fluttering. The time I take to weaving.

I know exactly when it was aligned and decided that you would come into fruition. The night of your conception, I felt the universe in the palms of my hands, like a vibrating room, like a clanging cymbal. It was as though my waking being had finally caught up with the others: you, the force moving through the earth and the sea like a wandering wind seeking shelter. Me and my anchoring strands, the wisps of Saturn threaded into my palms. Your father, who I chose for his indefatigable strength of action, of movement and will. All of us played by the mysterious hands of the original womb, our Earth, of whom we walk as the world.

You and you alone know the true meaning of travel: to move and be moved and in moving so worship the Earth. There is no time for stasis, for sitting, for feeding on resources according to programmed buttons on a screen. Your father, who had neither cell phone nor digital device, contained something I admire and aspire to hold onto in myself: the ability to walk through a neighborhood, a city—an entire country—and feel at home. Let me tell you: everywhere we went, doors opened. When they didn't, he talked; asked around. We struggled until we found a way through, and walked through gracious openings.

Me and my  
anchoring strands,  
the wisps of  
Saturn threaded  
into my palms.

All my life has been in service to this movement. I believe it to be called Action: a freedom to roam. A freedom deeply rooted to one's place of being. Heritage, that unconscious gift we offer to our kin: you are African American—a survivor of torture, slavery, and an incurious jealousy of which we call racism—you are Filipina—the offspring of warriors caught in a new kind of battlefield, away from the forests and trees—

and Cubano. I know what I know about my own places of origin—not just the city and country of my birth, but all the places I have moved through, and in turn have been moved by. It will be an honor to watch you unravel the brown and black stories of yours, all the metaphors and mysteries we extract from the decrepit tales assigned to us by others.

We dig. We call it a beautiful struggle. We reclaim the terrible beauty in surviving and thriving in a world so woefully plagued by foreign gods.

Your flutterings have ceased. I think it is time for a snack.  
I want to leave you with this—the most vivid truth I can offer—

When you came to me, I saw light brown pebbles, clear running water—an eternal wall made of pure river. Since then, I've seen waves thirty stories high conquer entire forests. I've seen hurricanes made of seaweed, I've heard the world go silent and static as you approach. This is to say you are of the force that makes people tremble. This is a blessing. To own this and carve it as strength for your people—whoever you decide them to be—may be the task of your lifetime, as it has been mine.

In closing, I offer you my beauty—the ever ascending thorny spiral—and the thick strength of a line, which belongs not to me, but to your father.

It is 3:37AM on October 1st. A Tuesday.

—and in these last words, I have just been whispered what your name is.

This piece was originally published in *Pussy Magic*. It is republished here with permission of the author.

# Summer's Womb

Billimarie Lubiano Robinson

She knows we have arrived. Summer knows  
and she is nervous.

The ground is taking rise  
in waves of heat toward the sun.

She is trying to make it unbearable. Force us to *plop*.

No, Summer intends to burn us. Scrape us like burnt batter,  
scavengers on the fringe of her walls.

Consider the moon. There is a reason for ascorbic acid,  
for parsley's growth. Dong quai. Blue and black cohosh and pennyroyal.

Herbs will not interrupt us.  
We are stubborn. Forgetful.

We are reckless inside her.

The world and her labored breathing.  
Allowing abuse from Autumn, Fall's strike

a last resort in the face of our will to survive.  
She will expel us. Emptied, exhausted,

leaving us to cyclical burden.  
Emergence. Stumbling. Craving

without knowing why. Soon guilt  
and atonement. Then renewal.

The last being consecrated heat.

# Bloodstains

Billimarie Lubiano Robinson

Last night  
over the obituaries

radiant humming outside myself

your eyes running over my shirt  
the wound beneath

bloodstains and quiet

vague sensation  
lifted being

time soaked

waking water  
falling vision

your hands  
draped in shadows

guiding me

unlicensed sleep



# Purple

Billimarie Lubiano Robinson

between night and sound a dull desaturation hangs in the distance, backdrop to portraits of streetlights crying LED tears, and with enough scratching you can pull all the lights out—*static*—BOOM—can you hear it?—I am tuning myself in at high purple frequencies, as if I were unlost, and also, a machine: tiny organic gears, cyclical—and holy—repetitive, outside minutes and time, outer limbs wading through patient lines of *depth perception*—whispers dark like music to my eyelids as you become many things at once; without sleep I was afraid I would lose you in the encounter of a thousand different people at once: most I did not like, others I could not recognize; falling soundlessly during unmeasured moments I caught reflections through the space in my warm, red fuzzy palms, *can you see the stars in your eyes?*, maybe glass shards from angel wings pooled light when we brushed against them, whichever way I looked there they were: bright, elastic asterisks, cosmic ejaculation, webbed and crystallized sparkles in the deep black of your dilation—you couldn't see it, but I knew that night as the world exhaled around us that if I stared at you at just the right interval, calculating space time velocity, parallel distance continuum reality, I could ascend, slowly, and find the universe



# Nine Weeks, Six Days

Billimarie Lubiano Robinson

*for jukai*

It's not a sentence, nor a deadline. I'd call it more or less a promotion, a leveling up, if you will. Three-fourths of one year. That's all the time in the world, more time than some will ever get. And I'm just past day sixty eight. What a marvelous time to be part of the world, an observer, taking it all in through you

quietly, I  
grow.

I don't want to bullshit you. I know  
that I can't. I'm undecided  
in my desire for consciousness.

Would you return the ticket, if you could?  
Your answer depends on the grass  
neither of us have grazed upon.

My world is sound. I want  
to grasp concepts  
and hate the little things

as people do. The terror of death  
is alien. I hear  
it drive us

grows us out: expansion.  
But I am just  
rapid development.

And I lean in  
to all the sounds  
I am given

I'm sorry  
I have arrived. Your unconscious  
invited me.

We both wish there were a less  
awkward way

perhaps ceremony  
something where love is exchanged

we two parties  
both wishing the other well

a parting  
like pulling moss from dead trees

I know it hurts  
I know about erasers

You can only think of crayons  
and tiny handprints

Mother's Day cards

we both  
want what's best

trouble is  
not knowing

fires die  
embers  
drift

I don't know  
what's to know

moonlight upon your skin  
I feel your hormones kicking in

and I am just a poetic device you call a speaker  
here to make you feel better

we both know I  
am somewhere else

that's the biggest problem, isn't it  
if only you could knock  
and say  
hello

some of us would say no

others yes

and quite a few

uncertain  
you make your choices

strange, this rhetoric we utilize  
for something so visceral

that's profane

that is not my burden

hello

it is you, the born, who manipulate

the rest of us  
just

# Adam

## Billimarie Lubiano Robinson

Said limbs had baited him. Pulled  
by her quicksand lips.  
And hair: a net  
for ensnaring men  
who believe they can fly.

**Billimarie Lubiano Robinson** is a wandering artist, creative technologist,  
and writer. Her work has appeared in the *Newer York*, the *Northridge Review*, and *Eastern Iowa Review*. Find out more at [www.billimarie.com](http://www.billimarie.com) and [www.typewriterpoetry.com](http://www.typewriterpoetry.com).

# notes from the other world

Megan Conley

i.

in the world where everything is possible, I listen  
to the ghost of Carlos Bulosan  
and write a screenplay.

*America is in the Heart* becomes the greatest  
10-part historical fiction series  
HBO has ever produced:  
gritty, violent, filled with the  
underrepresented  
invisible minority.

I put together the  
single  
only  
all  
Filipino-American  
production  
in U.S. history.

*Crazy Rich Asians* quakes in its boots.

I win several Emmys—  
Carlos Bulosan leaves me alone  
for now.  
I ride the wave of fame to publish  
an equally successful series of novels, the protagonist  
a dashing, young, five foot five, Filipino man  
who is never called  
*too short* or  
*boyish*.

several Asian girls date him:  
all of them have dated Asian guys before, and  
they all wear high heels.

ii.

in the world where everything is possible, I tell  
Duterte to go fuck a carabao  
on international television, and  
my mother still chucks her shoe at me because  
*putang ina, your dress is too low cut!*

when I go to the Philippines,  
I know Tagalog, Visayan, Ilocano,  
all 170 languages of the islands  
scrawled in thin black paint along my teeth.  
When I smile, every Filipino  
who looks at me can see this.

I build my family a new house  
the finest residence in Pasig  
rooms enough for all my titos and titas. Despite this,  
my cousins still sleep in one room, out of habit.

iii.

in this world where everything is possible, I grow  
my hair long and then longer  
until the ends brush the backs of my ankles  
skimming the floor while I walk.

in the world where everything is possible, I carry a bucket  
to the hospital where my mother is a nurse.  
I walk past incubators, antiseptic acute  
familiar on her scrubs.  
in a rocking chair, at 3am,  
she nudges a bottle into a baby's  
weak mouth.

I kneel in front of her  
with my thick, long hair  
and wash her feet.



# ½ asian girl sends the same risky text

Megan Conley

boy i like looks straight at me and says / he likes Asian Girls / but just not me, and i know / what that means. boy i like / could be any color / any background / he'd still say the same thing / still say this body isn't Asian. / that it does not fit / his Asian Girl: / this brown, off-color skin and / these chafing thighs do not fit in his hand. / i am too big to curl around / hair too short / can't be cuffed around a wrist. / Asian Girl means ownable / shameable / means he wants to touch my thigh & watch me shrink / wants a waist thin & / pale wants to feel me / breakable. / so when my body reaches back, he calls me / Not His Type, which is to say / Not Asian, so / i spend hours in the dark on instagram / follow too many ABGs & k-pop models / wish myself more almond-eyed / lighter-skinned / wish my tongue a mother / wish more trips homeland / wish more titas & lumpia & adobo / wish more tagalog / wish more fingers dipped in suka dipped fish / scroll until i / wish myself / whole.

**Megan Conley** holds a degree in English language and literature from the University of Maryland. Her work has appeared in *Anak Sastra* and the D.C. creative magazine, *The Vibe Room*. She currently works as an assistant editor outside Washington, D.C. You can find her ranting on Twitter about books at [@fatorangecat\\_](#).

# Who Are You Swinging At?

Abraham A. Joven

*After Joseph Rios*

“It’s like fighting ghosts, I think,”  
I whisper as my heart finally settles.  
Surveying the room that felt like home  
Now turned into a scene of horrors;  
Stranger to me after all of this,  
And I feel a stranger in it after all of this,  
And we just feel estranged.

I never knew the man the way I’d hoped.  
And some time at some place, I know,  
I’d convinced myself I’d find him where  
He’d always been:  
The bottom of the bottle.

Running was natural. Soccer was my favorite  
Sport and even though I hated the conditioning drills  
Or the long run days, I think the running  
On the pitch felt like second nature  
Because the air I’d take in  
And the space I’d cover  
All served to take me away from him.

But when I’d run out of reasons not to  
Or spaces to hide from  
The question I was most afraid of,  
I’d finally relented.

And I guess, at least, I know the answer now.  
Even if the future is scarier for knowing.  
There are spirits trapped in each bottle  
And not all of them carry the cure

To grieving your father.

# Kamay

Abraham A. Joven

You love telling the story of how  
I'd fall asleep rubbing your pinky finger  
Back when we all slept in the same bed.  
A one-bedroom apartment for five people -  
Even if it was really only four of us most nights -  
Was cramped, but you made it home.  
I watch you run your hands together, skin weathered  
Now and etched with more wrinkles than I remember.  
I didn't appreciate it then, but those soft hands  
Toughened over the past two and a half decades  
For me. For Tim. For Ace.  
As I watch our child being cradled by their *Lola*  
I reach for your hand again. Different and the same.  
These hands bare a tapestry of love.

# Bury the Dead

Abraham A. Joven

My neighborhood's dying  
At least that's what they say.  
Shuttered store fronts  
Empty houses  
And pan handlers almost as numerous  
As the cars on Mission.

But they don't see  
After the sun goes down  
The lights flicker on in the homes  
On Sky Meadow  
Or in the apartments  
On Tilton.  
They don't see us kneading bread  
Or splitting tamales  
Or rolling lumpia  
In our kitchens.  
Checking homework  
Or talking about that *one* guy  
Always stealing my stapler  
At the dinner table.  
Balancing budgets  
Or shifts of work and feeding the baby  
Under those same lights.

Well, let the dead bury their dead  
We've still got some living left.

# Rift

Abraham A. Joven

I am a Child of the Philippines.  
Born of wild, jumbled colors:  
Bright yellow mangoes dabbed with  
Red, shimmering turquoise in the waters  
*Balikbayan*-ing to the shores of  
Palawan, candy pinks and purples ringing the jeepneys  
In Manila, earthy brown and deep greens in the  
Hills that ensconce Baguio.

But I went away.

I am a Child of Hawthorne.  
Raised in the concrete  
Meant to stamp us out but  
Rising, rising, rising, always rising  
Like that Rose. A heart encased in  
Thorns.

Defensive.  
Vulnerable.  
Alive.

I am a Child now grown.  
I am a child between two homes.

# The Thing We're Building

Abraham A. Joven

My hands are muddy  
And worn  
And leathered  
From this thing we're building.

I don't know  
Don't care to  
Know anything  
About this thing we're building.

Who comes inside  
Who stays outside  
Who isn't even considered  
For this thing we're building.

We were told it was Eden  
New Jerusalem  
Heaven  
But we've built a tower in Babel instead.

**Abraham A. Joven** is a writer and immigrant rights advocate based in Southern California. Working at the intersection of social justice and faith, he crafts art reflective of his experience. He lives in Southern California with his amazing wife and loves Liverpool Football Club, Hamilton, and anything related to comic books.



# Someone who looks like me

Leila Tualla

You built a longer table to include  
someone who looks like me.  
Then proceeded to belittle and silence me.  
You took my voice,  
used my stories,  
my words  
to benefit your ideas and nurse your ego,  
that you must be glamorous to know  
someone who looks like me;  
the token prize among a sea of conformity.

But I don't feel like a prize.  
I feel like a performer;  
acting just enough to fit in and  
detached enough to know I am merely a  
placeholder in your story;  
a reflection of your worldliness.

I indulge your fantasies  
and bear the brunt of pretense.  
All the while, aware that  
someone who looks like me  
is building us a round table.

**Leila Tualla** is a Filipino-American memoirist, poet, and Christian author. Leila's books include a YA Christian contemporary romance called, *Love, Defined* and a memoir/poetry collection called *Storm of Hope: God, Preeclampsia, Depression and Me*. Her poetry is featured in a few mental health anthologies, including "Please hear what I'm not saying," "You are not your r\*pe," and "Persona non grata." She is currently working on a poetry collection based on Asian American stereotypes and identities. Leila lives in Houston, Texas with her first generation Mexican American husband and two miracle "Mexipino" babies.

# 333

Riana Jane Youngken

I prayed for my heart to stop hurting  
Angels heard me and led me to the source  
Of repeated mistakes, self sabotage,  
Overlooked red flags and undervalued self

*"You will not heal unless you let this die,"*

Even though I knew it was right  
I wept for her  
I wept for a young girl who didn't know that she deserved better  
For a young woman who didn't know when it was time to walk away  
For all that she gave out of a fear of lacking

I mourned an ending  
I feared beginning again  
Afraid of learning to love myself  
After a lifetime of believing that it was hard to  
That I didn't deserve to  
But I need to

I rise to meet the Sun every morning  
He finds a home on my skin and warms it with his stories  
I sit with the Earth  
She holds spaces for me to witness my body as one with all life  
I see my reflection in the moon  
She shows me that in every phase  
I remain  
In orbit around a world that loves me whether I am empty or full  
And a Sun that longs to illuminate my waxing and waning

999

Riana Jane Youngken

I made myself believe that I belonged in a place where fog covets blue skies  
Where cold wraps around and pulls us together  
I wrote myself into a story that could never yield a happy ending  
I gave love that could never be reciprocated  
I held space for someone who could never hold me  
I know now that I went wrong  
When I tried to become warmth under your clothes  
Or fog to shield you from the sun  
Thinking that it's okay that you don't love easily  
Because I love a good challenge  
I see now that it was fated to end  
You shaped me in ways that you will never know or see  
You have said goodbye to me in my dreams  
Now I wake in sunshine  
That kisses my skin  
And warms me throughout and within  
Sunshine  
That loves me without hesitation  
And with perfect timing

**Riana Jane Youngken** is a Pinay based in Southern California. She is an Environmental Studies alumna of San Francisco State University and a former educator for Pin@y Educational Partnerships. She currently serves as a CAYEN Board Member and is working to establish herself as a writer. Instagram: **@sadgrrlriri**

coming out

Sophia Paige

the second grader was not aware of the meadow  
only of the sweet sapphic scent of lavender  
she played tetherball with her best friend  
wearing blue, button up blouses  
like the ball wrapping itself around the pole  
the string unraveled and out poured  
feelings  
during a time golden as the short hair her best friend wore  
blessed with natural highlights  
streaks kissed by the sun  
she sighs gleefully

that summer

they lay under a tree  
    branches with ripe fruit blushing  
at this youthful scene  
she climbed  
    her heart clinging for dear life  
    picking limes  
rays rushing to gather their innocent glow  
    endless honey and sugar to go along  
    *we'd make a great pair* she thought.

her best friend took her inside  
    listening to her piano playing  
with every note her fingers sank into  
    the fake keys  
playing a melody she has never heard  
    ears electric for the touching tune  
    it was only a keyboard  
but it felt so real  
    maybe this is love  
    for music, of course

in middle school  
    she traded polos for plaid skirts

at an all girls school  
so she came out to play  
    her childhood heart  
    ablaze around the playground  
free to roam the meadow  
    lavender growing all around

by high school  
    she knew  
    it was real  
the melody plunked out on the piano  
    repeating itself in her mind  
    *i am here*  
she could no longer deny  
    that she grew lavender  
    for her best friend  
plucking herself from the meadow  
    ring around the rosy  
    a pocket full of posies

ashes, ashes  
    she fell  
    for her.

**Sophia Paige** is currently studying at DePaul University in Chicago Illinois. She is a first-generation Filipino-American woman born and raised on Oahu, Hawaii. Having several creative passions such as music and photography, poetry is another form of art she utilizes to explore and reflect on her identity as a queer Filipina navigating life experiences. She also uses her art to uplift, heal, and empower those in her community.



# Wake

Steffi Tad-y

The sky has yet to fume  
& suffuse the nation with sweat.

This was where we were, tamarind  
& steady wind by the window,

two of us without a word, each  
with a pillow to the chest.

I patted your fifty-seven year old  
hair, more salt than silk,

more prickly than the past.

That Sunday, we did not talk  
about which ballplayer choked,

who was favoured to win,  
or some lining in the cloud.

We received —

no chide from the quiet  
but we heard the makings

of Mom preparing  
for the funeral. I haven't

been here for awhile —

the summer trees  
this sharper air  
& what we had to tread.

there were leaves

that lent its heft  
to the word *rustle*,

leaves that sounded  
like the rain,

leaves with so  
much green to give,  
the window

was a mirror, my father  
and I just sat there  
& cried.





# On Caring

## Steffi Tad-y

The country I left at twenty-two  
is called a temp  
agency of the planet.

I serve skills  
in the business of likeability  
& looking away.

Bow your head down.  
Smile. Baby, give me.  
That smile.

Book it.

For every customer  
who hurled, “Come on,  
where my Filipinos at?”

I wish I was a whip  
speaker.

Instead of freezing.

Instead of diabetes will not know  
I brought home a thousand timbits.

Instead of it’s all good, you can now  
insert your debit or credit card.

I ignored

this lonely shudder & the cost  
of maintaining a crescent weapon

constricting the jaw,

straining the scalenes,

my shoulders  
and now, your shoulders.

I thought a poem  
if it earns

a pocketful  
of punchlines

would offer me a way out.

But I keep  
circling back to the shoulders,  
this poem is only a poem.

and it is about the shoulders.

**Steffi Tad-y** is a Filipina writer based in Vancouver, B.C. She writes poems about migration and everyday life in the diaspora. Her latest work was published by Frog Hollow Press in 2019. One of her current and present goals is to write a funny poem.

# *HONEYMOON: FIN*

Isabel Angeles

but i'm jealous of the girl with the doe eyes  
and the spring-fresh face:  
rosebuds blooming pink in her cherub cheeks,  
feverish with punch-drunk love for the boy-next-door.  
do you remember what it was like to see stars  
after soft lips locked?

shrug the shimmering over-the-moon dust off your shoulders —  
— the magic has worn off.  
and though the fireworks burst bright in his eyes and yours  
the still sky is lonely and longing for light.

don't you wish  
you were dipping your hands  
in jars of honey instead?  
i would rather be stuck with sweetness,  
moonstruck and tongue-tied  
at the brushing of his fingers  
against mine.

but now it is time to learn  
how to fall in love with you  
all over again,  
each time different than the last.  
and this is romance at its finest,  
is it not?

we were royals once —  
— in the halcyon days where young love reigned.  
this empire has not crumbled yet.  
just shaken by the earth quaking beneath our feet  
and the tempest of thoughts  
that storm and cloud our clockwork minds.

pieces of our castle crash down and collect dust  
but we can rebuild this home together  
and each time  
we will reassemble it with steel.

step through the illusion  
and let the painted background  
tumble over and splinter.

rekindle this flame with the debris of our old ways,  
watch it grow and warm us.  
it wavers and falters,  
shrinks and smokes,  
but never goes out.

pull my sugared hands out of the glass,  
wash the liquid off my fingers,  
intertwine your hand with mine.

so long as you are the keeper of my heart  
and i the keeper of yours,  
we will conquer this world together.

— *“honeymoon: fin”, i.a.*

**Isabel Angeles** (she/her/hers) is a 20 year old Filipina writer/poet from Northern California. She is also an intersectional feminist, activist, and performer. Isabel attempts to utilize the arts as a platform for her experiences as a Filipinx-American, being an immigrant, her bisexuality, and reclaiming identity. Her poetry also deals with other subjects such as addressing racism against Asians, womxn empowerment, romance, and more. Isabel is also the founder of the Walang Hiya Project ([@walanghiyaproject](#)), a collective for Filipino womxn and NB Pinxys which strives to be an outlet for healing and decolonization.

*pruned*  
Abbey Monsalud

words bloom amongst weeds  
prune the unsure  
till and turn  
quench  
bask and bake  
quench  
till and turn  
prune the unsure  
words bloom amongst weeds  
cut and hung to dry

**Abbey Monsalud** is a second-generation Filipina immigrant from Chicago, Illinois. She is currently en route to become a licensed art therapist and counselor. She is a novice to poetry, but she has always been intrigued by the power of words and the process of its art. Abbey hopes that her poetry reaches out to those who also feel small in this vast world.

It Isn't Ignoring, It's Love  
Christian Hanz Lozada

The good years at home  
were the ones when Brown Dad worked  
constantly.  
White Mom did the same thing: work  
constantly,  
especially  
when Brown Dad was home.

Brown Brothers, Mixed-race me, and White Brother learned  
learned to work  
constantly.  
The ideal relationship  
is never seeing your partner.  
Brown Dad and White Mom sleep in separate rooms,  
for work, she says  
Brown Brother 1 lives a continent away from his wife and kids  
for work, he says  
Brown Brother 2 divorced  
for work, he says  
White Brother works 12 hours a day  
6 days a week  
constantly

Love, for us, is mixed with desperation  
what good is love, if the kids gotta eat?  
what good is love, if it needs attention?  
Do you know how hard it is to express love  
by saying I don't want to see you?

# Moving on Up

Christian Hanz Lozada

Did you know, with success,  
you have to learn new rules,  
white rules?  
And by the time many of us get there,  
we are so broken,  
tired,  
to learn.  
After sacrificing his health for 15 years,  
Brown Dad crawled out of the third world  
with two kids  
and the ghetto  
with two more kids and a wife on his back  
out and to the suburbs.  
As soon as we moved in,  
he bought chickens,  
to make noise whenever there was movement  
to make eggs for breakfast  
to make Fountain Valley home.  
This angered the shit out of our White neighbors,  
as did the derelict cars on the front lawn,  
as he hoped, wanted, tried to fix them.  
And he'd see his accomplishments:  
a menagerie in the back  
a mansion in the middle  
a fleet of cars up front  
as a life worth living.

But  
when you see the families in the neighborhood grow  
when you see kids become friends become families  
when you see block parties without invitations  
you start to feel like a blemish  
a blemish on the pure,  
clean,  
White  
face of the neighborhood.

# Chasing a Happy Memory

Christian Hanz Lozada

Sometimes my older brothers would cook porkchops in the afternoon,  
during those hours after school when our parents were working  
and we hid in fear instilled by White Mom and Brown Dad  
of the dark people outside our door,  
I only have the fear to describe the neighborhood  
not fact, never fact.

Sometimes my older brothers would cook porkchops in the afternoon,  
seasoned with Lowry's, and sitting on white rice.  
It was magical:  
the salt, the fat, the grease  
When our normal was beans and rice and absence,  
a porkchop and Lowry's are a goddamned miracle.

A child doesn't know absence without those rare and beautiful moments  
when your manoy would turn on the stove  
and feed you.

**Christian Hanz Lozada** is the product of an immigrant Filipino and Daughter of the American Revolution and has co-written the poetry book *Leave with More Than You Came With*, published by Arroyo Secco Press and a photographic history book *Hawaiians in Los Angeles*. His poetry has been anthologized in *Gutters and Alleyways: Poems on Poverty*, *Cadence Collective*, and his poems and stories have appeared in *Hawaii Pacific Review* (forthcoming), *Dryland: A Literary Journal* (forthcoming), *A&U Magazine*, *Spot Literary Journal*, *Blue Collar Review* and various other journals. He hosted the Read on till Morning literary series and Harbor College Poetry Night, and has been invited to read or speak at the Autry Museum, the Twin Towers Correctional Facility, and other places throughout Southern California.



# Scrapbook

## Ram Meris

*Response Piece to Edith Tiempo's "Bonsai"*

All that I wish  
to forget  
but recall again  
is kept in a metal box  
Or in a fancy silver frame  
Or in my hand stitched wallet.

All that I loved?  
Why, yes, but just for a moment-  
And, sadly, not for eternity.  
A few other reminders:  
The plane tickets to our honeymoon,  
The withered bouquet in a crystal vase,  
A picture of our three-layer cake, even  
Our joint bank account statements.

It's utter curation,  
How memories punish  
Moment to moment  
To scale the past down  
To a flash of recollection

Till sweetness turned pain  
From human frailty  
When life and love seemed real  
The things you hope  
To run away from  
Are bitter reminiscences.

**Ram Meris** currently studies at De La Salle University Manila.

# GRAND

## Elsa Valmadiano

A lazy summer afternoon  
when kindergarten was over  
and afternoons were eternal  
I'd sit on the sofa with Lilang,  
her soft endless wrinkles  
chasing each other  
around the tips of her eyes  
and the drop of her cheeks.

The whistle of the breeze, the angin  
against the avocado tree in the backyard  
would echo shadow breezes  
against banana trees in the land  
we left behind.

The weight of her eyelids would  
focus on the end of a thread  
which she would effortlessly push  
through the hole of a pin  
while singing Ilokano love songs  
under her breath.

I'd play with the soft flap of her skin  
swinging gently from her arms and  
she'd push me away laughing  
while trying to sew.

When she saw I was bored  
she'd pretend to fail at pushing the thread  
through the hole of the pin and ask for my help.  
My soft little hands would push the end  
of that almost invisible thread effortlessly through  
and she would be full of awe  
as if I had granted her salvation.

\*\*\*

Lilong would be watering his eggplants outside  
with his baseball cap, flannel shirt, jeans  
and K-Swiss tennis shoes.  
The shoes were a hand-me-up from my brother  
who tired of shoes easily  
while Lilong fished them out of our closet,  
saw their unfulfilled potential  
and adopted them as his own.

Lilong wouldn't slip his entire heel in,  
not because they didn't fit,  
but because he couldn't be bothered.  
After several years the heel would be  
worn out, bent and flattened  
more an open-heel moccasin.  
He'd step casually on the muddy ground  
tanned by many yesterday suns.

\*\*\*

When I'd leave and say goodbye  
I'd embrace them  
with arms outstretched  
as far as they could go  
sometimes wondering  
who I embraced in my arms  
as their title of my father's parents  
who raised him under strict instruction  
meant nothing except they had been  
two old people whom I loved  
and lived in a home  
where the afternoon sun  
would creep through their blinds  
etching little streams of light  
forever on their faces.

# DEVELOPMENT WITH MOTHER

Elsa Valmidiano

We talk. No matter how awkward the  
subject. We talk some more.

We no longer talk about her bellybuttons—  
the first tying her to her mother's memory

and the second ending the possibility of more.

*But*, we talk

. . . about the decisions to end  
the origins of life before  
they can even begin

. . . about fists and words  
that leave battered women  
to eat dog food off the floor

. . . about men and men and  
women and women  
falling in love  
'til death do they part.

And we go shopping while I tell her  
it's okay to show some curves.

We had lost the ability to speak about  
our bodies somewhere along the way.

When the Spanish came?

When the Church told us  
our bodies were dirty and tempting?

The silence  
was suffocating. And I'm sure my mother

just wanted to breathe.

# EDEN

Elsa Valmadiano

When the serpent cord was cut  
my Mother almost bled to death.  
Like Eve, I had been Her  
more difficult creation  
whose innocent beginning  
cursed Her with  
swollen ankles and swollen feet  
when I didn't know, never knew  
our cord was making Her ill  
but like my forgiving God  
She did not cast down  
thunderbolts and lightning  
but held me instead  
naming me in Her likeness  
naming me after Herself.  
My first home had never been  
from Adam's rib  
but Her womb and  
She was my God.

Was God when I finally emerged.

**Elsa Valmadiano** is a Filipina-American writer and poet. She is the author of *We Are No Longer Babaylan*, her debut essay collection from New Rivers Press. She is a recipient of their Editors' Choice selection from their 2018 Many Voices Project competition in Prose. Elsa's work has appeared in journals such as *Mud Season Review*, *Yes Poetry*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Anomaly*, *Cherry Tree*, *Canthius*, *Poetry Northwest*, and many others, as well as anthologies such as *Walang Hiya*, *Loon Magic and Other Night Sounds*, and *What God Is Honored Here*. Elsa is an alum of the DISQUIET International Literary Program in Lisbon and Summer Literary Seminars hosted in Tbilisi. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Mills College and has performed numerous readings. She is a Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominee. On her website, [slicingtomatoes.com](http://slicingtomatoes.com), Elsa showcases a directory of Filipina artists of the Philippine diaspora alongside her poetry. Her Instagram handle is [@ElsaValmadiano](https://www.instagram.com/ElsaValmadiano).

# Major Arcana 0: Complaint Note from Anagolay, Goddess of Lost Things

Hari Alluri

*After Barbara Jane Reyes*

*"If the Tao has come forth to teach you... the world is asking you to welcome new lessons."*  
—Jana Lynne Umipig, "Tao – The Fool," *Kapwa Tarot*

I'm only saying I wish. Carefully, my people,  
there is so much you are forced to lose

and so much you think you own  
but can't, I wish you give more

attention the small few things that's yours. Only  
because their yelling for you hurts me, the yelling

pull from that set of keys  
you just had in your hand. Bic lighters. Eye-

liner. Knee brace. Gum. Kangol hats  
off balconies. Photo album, empty, a body

for what is safe to keep. Wallet. Anting-anting  
worn like a memory. Who knows temples

get plundered buried overbuilt, easy as languages  
a story needs to live?—I do. Today my petition



returns these little things: nail clippers; shook-up pen; criminal  
pair of shades; beers at barbecues leaning, fluting wind  
at gam; the tarnish on your lola's one good ring.  
I don't mean single socks, though:

every clothing dryer is my altar. I ask for  
neither tithe nor tax. The cleaned and missing

warm-touch socks, call them pasalubong: almost offerings, only  
to remind you. This is how you are with me:

the way wear them out, forgetful  
they hold you.



# Hama, at Cavern's Mouth (Major Arcana XVIII: Holder of Shadows)

Hari Alluri

*"Bloodbending is a specialized sub-skill of waterbending that allows an extremely advanced waterbender to take hold of and manipulate fluids within an organism's body, allowing the bender to move the person's muscles"*

—Fandom Wiki, Avatar [the Last Airbender]

When I say bloodbend, I mean the catastrophe  
I found a way to become. To live with surviving  
the end of my own people,

a residue of moon. I mean the tides  
reminding magnets how big  
attraction is. You don't need to speak

planets and stars: they're  
blood too. I mean a prison designed to render  
my discipline useless: breaking

out of that. No question, I plumb  
down to my cruelty. I mean the invention of  
another form of key. The hand

who would extinct me, torqued:  
as in puppet. When I say crouching  
I mean moon, no matter the partial phase we see, realized

and full: like anyone rendered enemy  
by empire, arrested. I mean for us to bend  
toward what powers us. I mean

we dance inside ourselves even when we're still.



# Seeking Union + Returning: Ang tubig ay buhay

Hari Alluri

*For Chris Aldana, after Shawna Yang Ryan & Simi Kang / after Tiana Clark / after Yasiin Bey / after Bruce Lee, Junie Désil, Kenji Liu, Cynthia Dewi Oka, Amanda Fuller, Kimmortal, Sham-e-Ali Nayeem, Chris Santiago, and Julay*

MY NAME IS WATER, AN ELEMENT TO OFFER & WHO IS OFFERED TO | TO MANY, I AM HOME | TO SOME, THE CLOSEST RESEMBLANCE TO, EVEN WHEN TREATED OBSTACLE | I, ANOTHER NAME FOR MIGRATION, FOR SOLUTION: LIFE & GRAVE | AT THOSE WHO TURNED ME INTO THE SENTENCE OF THE PEOPLES BOUND & FORCED ACROSS ME, I WILL NEVER STOP CHURNING | I WEEP AT MY PART—THE PART OF ME THAT’S DOOM | WEEP WHEN DESCENDENTS OF WHO SURVIVED HAVE SPACE IN THE HEART TO LOVE ME STILL | ALWAYS, I AM THE DISTANCE & THAT WHICH CONNECTS | I AM THE WIDEST CROSSROADS :::::::::: KNOW I AM NO ONLY BORDER | ASK THE CAT-SIZE DEER WHO LEARNED TO WATER WOLF, CAPSIZED INTO CROCODILES, EVENTUALLY INTO WHALES: ASK THEIR SONGS, THE BIRDS WHO SURF THEM: I TRAVERSE | I RAIN UPON MYSELF, SWALLOW & AM SWALLOWED | EVAPORATE, CONDENSE | I FALL FROM MYSELF MILES AWAY | I PLAY & STRUGGLE | I PUSH AGAINST ANY FORM BLOCKING MY RETURN | I RISE & RUNNEL | CRADLE | TATTOO | I NEED HELP, TOO | I CLOG | I PATIENCE THOUGH IN CAVERN & IN STORM | LITANY OASIS IN ONOMATOPOEIA | DRIP ME TO SINK, TO COUNTER & FLOOR: I MAKE MESS AS I CLEAN | I QUEER & CLEAR | I GLEAM | I PUDDLE, I RIVER, I LAKE, I STREAM | I OCEAN & I SEA | I RESPITE & I LEAVE | YOU NEED ME TO THE POINT THAT I’M MIRAGE | YOU FEED ME YOUR ILLUSIONS, FILL ME WITH YOUR WASTE :::::::::: : & STILL, MAHAL KITA | DAGAT AKO ::::::::::: THOSE WHO COME FROM ISLANDS KNOW ME AS THE LONGING | I AM ITS HOME, ITS RHYTHM | I FLUID TO A GENDER | HARANA TO YOUR ORIGIN: I’M SUNG | CHORUS OF BANGKA JOURNEY TO COME, INCANTATION TO BEGIN | TO BAPTIZE PHOSPHORESCENCE | TO TELL YOU YOU CAN READ THE STARS | TASTE SALT AT HIGHEST MOUNTAIN RANGE, & WHO’S THE SNOW | SAY DROUGHT, INVOKE MY NAME | SAY CANYON, SPEAK MY MEMORY | SAY RICE TERRACE, SAY RICE COOKER | KETTLE ME AT MORNING | SAY TUMBLER, I ASSUME ITS SHAPE | SAY DAM, I CAN’T BE FULL HELD IN | YOU KNOW I HAVEN’T LEFT BECAUSE THE SUGAR’S ALL IN CLUMPS | SAY GLACIER, SAY MELT, SAY CAULDRON, SAY ROIL | YOU SELL ME TOO MUCH BOTTLED,

SPILL ME TOO MUCH OIL ::::: ASSUME THAT I'M BENEATH YOU & I CLOUD | GET  
HIGH & WATCH ME SHAPESHIFT | I, WHERE LIGHTNING FORMS | TO QUIET | TO PROTEST-  
LOUD | I BRUCE LEE MARTIAL ART | I AMEN TO A ROOT | TO CHANGE THE MOOD, I FOG  
| I PLUNDER, POUND & FLOUNDER | I SINIGANG | I LUNAR DRIFT | I BAKUNAWA CHASE  
ECLIPSE | I LAUNDER | I INUNDATE, TSUNAMI | LINEAGE EVERY BODY, NO SUCH THING  
AS PURE | SAY BLOOD & SWEAT & TEARS & HOPE, NO SUCH THING AS PURE | I RETURN  
HOW LOSS RETURNS, REMEMBERING A FATHOM POINT WHERE HARDNESS CRACKS,  
SO SOFTEN | FIND IN ME THE DEPTHS WHO PULL & SCRATCH UNTIL YOU FACE | AFTER  
THE FACING, THE UNDERTOW & SWIM BACK UP, COLLAPSE TO SHORE HOW I DO, WITH  
EACH NEW WAVE, & REST | VOICES CALL BEHIND—THEIR GLOW ABOVE A SHELL IN  
SAND | TO ASK ME FOR MY MEDICINE, ALL I NEED IS UNCONTINGENT GRATEFULNESS  
FOR THIRST | BE CARVED, LOOB, FROM A SINGLE SOURCE: FEEL YOUR OWN HUMIDITY  
| POUR ME INTO EARTH, FOR MY CYCLE TO RETRIEVE :::::

**Hari Alluri** is the author of *The Flayed City* (Kaya) and an editor at Locked Horn Press. A winner of the 2020 Leonard A. Slade, Jr. Poetry Fellowship and recipient of multiple grants and workshop fellowships, his work appears recently in *Anomaly*, *The Capilano Review*, *Prism International*, *The Puritan*, *Solstice*, and elsewhere.

# Meryenda

Maria Bolaños

Ma slices the mango into three parts. I'll show you a trick.  
She cups one portion and scores straight lines into the fruit,  
horizontal then vertical. Her fingers push softly upward  
into the mango skin, invert the bowl shape and the fruit  
erupts like a firework, spikes out in all directions.  
My sister and I applaud this magic show. A crown, Ma says.  
She gives it to my sister and makes the second for me,  
a halo this time. My nose fills with sweetness,  
lips purse around one ray of sun. I kiss and disappear  
yellow flesh. It tastes different in New Jersey. Ma keeps  
the center, smallest, thinnest. It is her favorite part  
— the way the fish head is her favorite part  
(she sucks out one eyeball, then the other)  
the way the burnt edge is her favorite part  
(she scrapes the brown off our rice) —  
Ma peels her core, the golden  
ring around the hard patch  
pale as an exposed chest.  
She bites, cleaves heart  
from bone. She smiles  
like she enjoys  
herself.

**Maria Bolaños** (she/her) is the General Editor for *Marías at Sampaguitas*. She is a Filipina-American poet and book reviewer and is committed to building spaces to nurture and showcase Filipinxao literature as well as Black, Indigenous, and POC literature. Her most recent poetry focuses on Fil-Am diaspora culture, and on retelling Philippine myths. Her writing has been featured in *Touchstone*, *Antigone*, *Chopsticks Alley*, and the *International Examiner*, among others. Maria lives on the stolen Gabrielino/Tongva land, Tovaangar. You can follow her poetry, essays, and book reviews on her Instagram, [@mariabeewrites](#).

# MOT JUSTE

Audrey L. Reyes

Who do I thank for the bouquets in my mouth?

for *petrichor*; for *kilig*    *mamihlapinatapai*    *rasasvada*  
for every stem    tipped and forgiving on my lips.

*Help me,*

I can't recall the word for the accidental dance  
between two people whose altruism gets the better of them.

Shouldn't there be a word for when we drown in black holes  
of our making?

*Maybe I am not privy to the tongue that bore it;  
I have but two.*

Is there an expression for wanting to protect your palate  
from all you deem unholy?

*I don't want you to fear adventure.*

What about for wanting to mother those you love  
despite knowing their capacity to hold their own?

*My sigil is an uncertain maiasaura.*

And what of this envy  
for not reaping the appellations we never thought we'd need?

*Who do I thank for these bouquets in my mouth?*

Certainly there is an end to naming this gratitude  
for reluctant fiddlers harvesting the flowers between our teeth

and humbling me to wield the blooms they’ve bestowed  
to a world we mistakenly pencil as lonely islands.

*What is the mot juste for those who’ve colored our grey questions  
into community?*

Glossary:  
**petrichor** - *n.* the distinctive earthy, usually pleasant smell of rainfall hitting dry ground  
**kilig** - *n. (Filipino)* The rush or inexplicable joy one feels after seeing or experiencing something romantic  
**mamihlapinatapai** - *n. (Yaghan)* The wordless, yet meaningful look shared by two people who both desire to  
initiate something but are both reluctant to start  
**rasasvada** - *n. (Sanskrit)* The taste of bliss in the absence of all thoughts

*Huni*  
Audrey L. Reyes

**Huni**  
*n. (Filipino) chirping or hooting of birds or fowls*

People foreign to our tongue say  
we sound like    birds.

I hope  
they mean  
we sound melodious  
                                when we chirp  
instead of thinking    we squawk  
like the firecrackers that we are.

And if  
the aviary game is    an elective,  
I cherry-pick  
                                the woodpecker’s tongue.

This draw out,            deliberate  
                                to tend  
with excess and boundlessness;  
                                I pull it out  
                                from the top of my  
                                skull  
to capture  
                                your nectarine attention,  
no crevice left        unexplored.

Maybe then,  
you’ll warble.

**Audrey L. Reyes** (she/her) is a queer Filipino poet, writer, and former early  
childhood educator whose favorite workplace activity is raising hell. Her work appears or is  
forthcoming in *QUINCE Magazine*, *NECTAR*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, and several other literary  
magazines. She resides in Manila, Philippines.

# glossary for love: part six of \_\_\_\_\_

Micah Rosegrant

after Franny Choi

	VENUS	VAMPIRE	COCK	SOIL
Meaning	lightbringer	an honest bloodsucker (actual sucker of blood)	a key for no lock	birthplace; fireplace; cemetery
See also	Pluto; heartbeat; bruises; stars	lust; luck; lips on another living thing	eggplant; trespasser; apparition; any synonym for <i>wait</i>	coffin-womb; mouth-mother; etymology of oxymoron
Antonym	Mars	bleeding	horizon	run
Origin	sea foam and sky blood	church; a daughter's father; a bump in the night as bible scream beneath bed	"what came first, the sword or the wound?"	wind meets time, water bears a baby with death
Dreams of being	herself	peaches	empty	N/A (does not dream; is the bed of all earthwonder)

# my island of many gods

Micah Rosegrant

my lola's hardin sweet and suckling in 26 degrees. heat makes for no god to this island woman ruling the world she birthed from 4'11" hips. height no god to skyscraper love towering and relentless against some demon called geography. distance no god to the telephone wires cross-country-cutting the ocean like moses escaping old history. the past no god to the present, new-day covenants bursting against ceilings of time x space x power. power still one god. a god who stay. who modernity fail to smite or flatten no matter how and how often we pray. we pray like we forget we prayed before. we pray forgetting how we submit our heaven's-on-earth deities to a spanish curse we call religion, this devil we would have slayed if he hadn't papier-mâchéd his bible into holy robes and halo slicing us into calling him father, son, spirit even after all the time he spends as witness and accomplice to innumerable white crimes. sins we call "righteousness" across centuries. my island of many gods still bows—despite all reason—before the pale christ who named himself king, and all us his servants.

**Micah Rosegrant** is a Co-Director of Emergence at Arts Connect International. Their words are published/forthcoming in *The Wave*, HowlRound Theatre Commons, *CONSTRUCT* zine, *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, and *The Margins*. [bit.ly/micahrosegrant](https://bit.ly/micahrosegrant) & [@micah\\_pdf](https://www.instagram.com/micah_pdf) on insta.



# from the frontline

Nashira

**from the frontline** they return: a generation burnt  
out from acts of service & burdens unheard of—

thankless work is something I'm familiar with.  
in this prison, we nurse bodies back to health

while walking on eggshells at home, a warzone  
made up of enemy lines turned inside-out when

extra hands are needed, then forgotten once  
the favor of grace is asked to be returned.

neither of us can keep up with playing healer  
for an entity that ultimately does not care. here

is the country that failed me & there was the country  
that failed you. it shouldn't have taken a plague for us

to be on the same page; for you to find the battles of  
the brain cannot be won with physical caution; for me

to feel grateful for my home life when this mess feels  
like it'll never end; after you leave, I clean. I fold sheets.

I dust. I fix tomorrow's breakfast. I have no power outside  
of keeping the house together and by my hands, I won't lose it.

**Nashira** (she/her) is an Afro-Pinay/Polynesian artist & activist from Cebu. She uses art as a weapon to champion for the rise & recognition of women of color. On Tumblr as **@nashira** and Instagram & Twitter as **@nashxra**. She is a regular contributor for *Marías at Sampaguitas*.

# Spring, 2020

James Croal Jackson

Spring's to bring the beacon.  
This year, just pollen  
after dead leaves.

(Crust of another burnt  
baking pan). Look  
how inside you are.

Time rolls down  
the verdant hills  
we left behind.

The empty storefronts—  
now the scene of a tripod  
positioned to catch a dance

party of one. Backdrop  
of dark, grimy windows.  
Still, the sky stays blue.

No molecule of spikes  
replicating itself endlessly  
above. Just the days.

All the days  
become the one  
before — a billion more.

# Entropy at Highland Square

James Croal Jackson

Each time I come home a little something  
erodes, a smooth stone rubbed against cement  
for a few hours. Walking into Zub's,  
into Ray's— used to be the crowd could be  
religious for me. A thunderspark, my ego  
self-distributed communion. Yes, I want  
a sea of friends to greet me when I go  
home, forever the place I must be  
magnetized to, being the treadmill I ran  
up to a certain age. I aged better than I  
thought, but I aged, I. aged, T. aged, T. aged,  
A. aged, M. aged, R. aged, W. aged— and live  
in other cities now. The jobs and kids, the  
*wanting* them— I acknowledge the finally  
shifting tectonics beneath my feet I so long denied.  
I stand at an empty table with everything extinct,  
drinking Christmas Ale in the light of flickering  
football fields. I play 20 Questions with myself  
imagining what my friends might ask me.  
Am I alive? A mineral? Furniture? Ovate,  
made of fur, smaller than a bread box?  
Am I a utility? Can I eat myself?

*Do you call when it's not convenient?  
When you are not around?*

*When?*

*Are you an animal? Malleable? Leather?  
A vegetable?*

*Are you something a bird might wear? A feather,  
weightless as the wind?*

# Cleaning a Room Is a Tornado of Cords

James Croal Jackson

right now our animal sits on a paper leaf  
bells in the other room  
and a TV remote's button-presses amplified thousandfold  
sometimes heartbeats in the walls  
tell me: is that faucet water or white noise machine  
plastic bags on plastic bags on  
you bring me a handful of the cat's toenails in your palm

# Two Days Before *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, Bernie Ends His Campaign

James Croal Jackson

to play a game is to simply look into a void I need  
to limit the amount my eyes (or else the world's  
but a buttercream) I dream I dream in pixels  
nostalgia of many Midgars transformed in what to partake  
but all these riches of revolution memory is a waterfall  
rushing headfirst cold into pointy rocks I wanted to forget this good  
game with you knowing neither of us could afford the new

# Clearing My Throat Before the Water

James Croal Jackson

These sheets are itchy—  
black silver Christmas present  
from my partner's parents.

This time of year is drymouth season.  
The absence of horseflies—  
still my skin wells up with red,  
clay for a malleable waking.

Shut my eyes— I never want to see  
the dying sun.

**James Croal Jackson** (he/him/his) is a Filipino-American poet. He has a chapbook, *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017), and recent poems in *DASH*, *Sampsonia Way*, and *Jam & Sand*. He edits *The Mantle Poetry* ([themantlepoetry.com](http://themantlepoetry.com)). Currently, he works in film production in Pittsburgh, PA. ([jamescroaljackson.com](http://jamescroaljackson.com))

# i had to look up what mahal means

katrina m

one of the first things people learn about me  
is that i'm half filipino.  
no no, not latina. asian.  
i could tell you how my dad was born  
in baguio city, and was the youngest son  
when he and his family moved to san francisco,  
where he later built a life of his own.  
met a sicilian woman who gave birth to two kids,  
a combination of both cultures,  
yet i really only know one of them.  
i look up tagalog on google and words that  
i can understand with ease become unintelligible-  
Mahal? what is mahal?  
oh... love  
that's what i feel towards my filipino-ness but it's  
almost like a red, white, and blue ribbon  
with a single golden strand clinging to both side-  
how can you explain to someone your culture  
when you've barely experienced it yourself?  
i will say this though: i do my best to tie more strands  
together with recipes for lumpia,  
and music,  
and poetry, and phone calls to my dad that are sprinkled  
with questions about whatever tagalog he remembers.  
i may not know much, but i can still say that  
if someone came for us,  
i'd still be one of the first in line to defend my people

**katrina m** is a queer, biracial writer and poet from Redding, CA, USA. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies from Southern Oregon University. She has been featured in various independent magazines, such as *Polemical Zine* and *Pinstriped Zine*. She enjoys boba tea, reading queer as hell books, and listening to music. You can see her work on Instagram [@thelittlemoonbi](https://www.instagram.com/thelittlemoonbi).

# {lead & rice; 12, 22-29}

## Bayani

i confess to you now without sin/  
without hesitation

the unspoken truth that  
i know who you are  
where you come from  
& what you've done  
in the witching hours without judgment,  
without sin  
without a wandering eye to witness  
every temptation considered  
& passed without incident,  
without effort/  
with herculean effort,  
your sun-kissed body full  
of grace & patience of a forgotten time,  
& your people's sin remembered  
inflicted

& repeated without hesitation.

here we walk the fey lines from station  
to station in our procession from the cross  
to gray river/ i walk the iron lines  
from station to station on the eastbound line,  
our broken bodies restored  
descended from the mountain  
& revisited in the final hours of battle  
& here we may walk alongside the shore  
hand in hand,  
ready to greet the coming day/  
ready to meet my father death  
at the breaking hour of the dawn rising-

here we may greet uncertain death  
as a familiar face & say:

“not today.”

in the empty song of building/  
the song of sweet sorrows  
in the purgatorial rite we labor  
in acts of meaningful suffering,  
with full intentions of penance performed  
(as prescribed) by every hand which bears  
the mark of those who have passed  
willingly into the hands of those  
who spares the child/  
& spoils the rod  
a lash for every transgression seen  
& every slight perceived  
by those who dare please the crown;

in broad daylight/ by night  
we come down from the mountain  
to the naked shores & deliver  
to those that dare to reap the typhoon.

here we walk the oldest ways  
from station to station,  
fourteen steps 'round the hill

*here we go 'round the prickly pear  
prickly pear prickly pear  
here we go 'round the prickly pear*

fourteen times 'round, &  
fourteen times more  
to remember yourself  
& every small gesture they forced  
upon you

by rites  
force  
the mark of the conqueror & crown  
carried to our mothers' shores,

& in due time our response which follows  
is as promised:  
the storm of rizalia bound  
for royal shores.



as they'd say in the mother tongue/  
i have forgotten the mother tongue  
i have forgotten myself  
& my own voice stifled  
    my father's voice taken  
& replaced with unfamiliar phrases/  
    replaced with familiar sounds of home lost  
& found again on distant shores,  
my own words taken again  
& replaced as a prize of war/  
    the word of the old king in prayer  
    the words of 1903:

“to uplift  
& civilize  
& christianize them”

rolling listlessly/ bitterly  
from our summer tongues.

[where rizal stood]

we faceless dead remember  
&           are remembered in turn  
by the curse of the winter sun  
without shame  
without sin  
without fear  
by our names forgotten  
& written down in textbooks,  
a people numbered & cataloged/  
redacted & reduced to  
our history rendered as curiosity,  
spoils, & the prices of lead  
    & rice;

lead was cheaper than rice.

# {in anno domini; 1-8}

## Bayani

(ages ago)

someone told me it all  
gets easier with time/  
it will all be funnier  
    after a time

but i couldn't remember  
if it was today or tomorrow;  
3 days ago/ 6 days to come  
but i still felt nothing  
    i still  
haven't slept well  
since then-

a certain tightness in my chest  
winding   tighter

but 3 or 4 years out  
& i'm finally free.

behold the old christ etherized  
upon a wooden table,  
the instruments of ageless faith displayed  
in glorious disrepair/  
enter the new christ presented  
upon the smallest of stages

(christ the tiger  
in a forgotten tongue)

the ageless face of despair wreathed  
in the pale light of the city  
& our terrified glances deliberately hidden  
by the shadow of exceptionalism,  
the promise of a thousand  
empty gestures taken  
from the old king shaken, received  
    by the new king delivered

by the right hand in due time,  
& in another,  
without judgement.

in the dance of kings  
we are the sainted/ dead  
& dying, graceless gestures  
passed from one hand  
into the next.

in the next round  
i may turn to you & ask  
if you are the first star fallen/  
the very first

that greets the dusk,  
& in time my own piousness  
may be rewarded by a crisis in faith,  
what words i'd said  
now proffered up & rendered  
faceless,

& raised up again  
in fulfillment of the scriptures-

hands crossed/ fingers  
crossed

just in case

this is the gesture passed  
from my hands  
into yours.

here we lean together  
& make speech/  
here we practice  
the drawing of the square  
& circle  
there in your mother's garden/  
there in the long space  
between childhood & old age  
briefly experienced,  
remembered only in the quiet moments

experienced

in the long walk home/

silent contemplation which strikes  
@ 2 in the afternoon  
or sleepy sunday mornings spent  
basking in the cool glow  
of sunlight filtered  
through dusty curtains,  
the warm aches of saturday spent  
drinking & singing/  
laughing & singing til dawn,  
chasing the next round down  
again & again

again

& again

in our innocent youth  
ages ago  
when we'd play outside  
we wandered our boyhood town/  
mindlessly walking the line  
from corner to corner  
a trip 'round the block  
from my house to yours there  
& back again,  
our skinned knees  
& dirt-stained hands telltale signs,  
the procession of spring yielding  
to the mountain air;

in our bittersweet youth  
a decade ago  
when we were carried inside  
to walk the line  
from station to station,  
dressed in our itchy sunday best  
pacing the circle 'round  
the worn pews, our frail bodies  
marked & made pale  
by the sign of salvation rendered  
unto fragile bone  
from dust unto dust  
ashes in a tin cup/  
the ashes of warm summer

lingering  
in the taste of sour wine  
swallowed,  
with haste.

“are you fallen?  
are you divine?”

i'll catch you  
10  
20  
30 years  
down the line.

(dead line ringing)

here i too make peace  
with open sea  
& the unbroken stream  
of anger distilled,  
a river king drowned  
& made faithless  
by every star that blessed his name/

in the name of our father &  
in the name of common reason, now  
i have few reasons for anger  
& one more for common fear/  
from the smallest slight,  
unseen & left undisturbed  
by an early dawn revealed  
by starlight gently fading,  
& the shadows cast  
by city light rising up  
to meet it.

2 years out i swore  
i knew you better/

2 years out  
& i know better.

the tongue tied (impatiently)  
reveals a winning hand/  
hands  
that would proffer up  
their own body & blood  
are bound;  
the warrior pacified  
& tomorrow's prophet silenced  
by known hands that would conspire  
against the living/

fearful of the living  
& ever envious of the dead-

*“may perpetual light shine upon them”*

& may their bones know  
lasting sleep in this life,  
& the warmth of the risen sun  
in the next;

close your eyes & allow  
the experience to wash over,  
every craving repressed/  
every impulse indulged  
& relinquished to mortal lustwe  
perform this role again  
                    & again  
                    & again

3 days spent asleep  
& i've found you

(what was that)

my latest manic panic  
don't panic/  
not again i said  
please not again  
but they just want to be beautiful,  
cheap pills  
cheaper thrills  
always in fulfillment of some scripture  
or another,  
but fiends like us know  
exactly what we want to go down

down

down

down

(was i waiting for this  
all my life?)

when it all comes full circle/  
when the circle finally closes,

thus this.

# {lead & rice; 46-49}

## Bayani

in our gray years we long  
for the long days of eating plums  
barefoot in the river, drunk  
on youth & blossom wine  
our wrinkled toes buried in the sand  
& silt gathered by time  
& gravity, the strong current which carries  
our tired bodies to a stranger shore  
& delivers us to

“that place where we were  
a minute ago”

where time is no longer circular  
& grief takes the form  
of my grandfather’s ghost come  
to tell me off/ come  
tell me to fuck off, but we pray  
for these years to pass  
without significant loss or  
event, a quiet life spent on the river  
& back again,  
or a decade spent in silence  
lost & apostate  
another pilgrim bound  
for foreign shores  
but i drove you every mile  
from gray city to solemn shore  
from gray youth  
unto dust, always dust

(screaming wild)

but i did not walk the waters  
of the hidden bay left  
unspoiled by the arrogance  
of the homesteader/  
but i watched the sun set low  
over mountain & horizon

over our lady of the valley  
the sea  
& the road walked  
& driven through the night  
in this quiet life  
interrupted  
by the old growth  
& twisted paths of a new world

in christ’s country  
our lord of the valley is withered/  
our lord of the sky is a withered  
old man/ he walks these ways  
as a stranger, the weight  
of his crimes supported  
by a bough of the sacred oak/  
i knew your love beneath  
the boughs of the old oak & heard  
your ragged voice pray  
not to bleached olive wood  
but to a brown goddess of the sea/

the river rushes onward  
onward ever  
onward

past a stone placed on a hollow stump/  
the stone lifted  
& the secret learned  
& revealed, my father’s name spoken:

(the hidden pines)

& my mother’s hand unbound  
& remembered by the dry banks

(the sea)

this is the journey made  
to the sea.

**Bayani** is a Filipinx-American interdisciplinary artist currently based in Minneapolis. Their eclectic practice extends through various lyrical gestures into poetry, performance, painting, and cast metal sculpture, through which they explore the graying materials, ambiguities, and intersections of colonial heritage, spirituality, and the metaphysical. Their instagram is **@iron\_\_\_daddy**



# Metanoia of a Catholic Fil-Am

Ennie-Marie Dacut Ilasco

I grew up in church  
at the heart of America,  
doodles of the crucifixion  
in crayon colors.  
They taught me about Jesus  
and He was the only  
thing I believed in.  
When I went to school  
and they asked what I am,  
they would furrow their brows.  
I was never Filipino to them,  
just someone who belonged  
to everyone else.  
A fallen Spaniard,  
Japanese resistance,  
the white American savior.  
I drank in Catholic mass  
and American liberty  
until I choked on the  
discovery of my ancestry.  
I was thirteen when I  
felt ashamed for not  
having an American heart.  
I was fifteen when I  
grew ashamed for not  
knowing our mother tongue.  
And I was eighteen when I  
developed shame for not  
reciting all my prayers.  
At the end of the day  
I sat in the corner  
putting together puzzle pieces

that weren't Me anymore.  
Was I built to split myself  
into various standards,  
into different identities?  
Would my soul be proud  
when I stared in the mirror  
unable to recognize myself?  
She came up from the glass  
and told me: close your eyes  
and let your bones rest.  
I am built from Adam's ribs,  
crafted by the love of God.  
But-- I have Mayari's blood.  
I have her moonlight glow;  
a heart that makes  
the sampaguita bloom.  
Eyes touched by Tala's hands  
and my mama's nose,  
brown skin, dark hair, and  
a touch of colonial ancestry.  
Can you be both  
the cross of Magellan and  
the spear of Lapu-lapu?  
Can you be both  
the mantle of Mother Mary  
and the crop of Lakapati?  
Can I find the balance between  
independence and interdependence?  
Or am I restrained,  
imprisoned by the idea of  
being "not Filipino enough"?  
Being a "fake Catholic"?

An "ungrateful American"?  
How long will I feel so  
apologetic for having  
my heart sculpted  
from different pieces?  
I am not Catholic because  
I have given up  
the parts of Philippines that  
history deemed unimportant--  
I choose to be Catholic  
because God and Bathala  
created a universe in which  
I can love freely and powerfully.  
They are mixed into one  
as all my identities have  
mixed and formed the  
mold of my very being.  
So from today forward  
I will no longer be weary from  
choosing one over the other.  
My feet will walk along  
the American dream,  
my heart will beat to  
the song of Jesus,  
and I will breathe in air  
the color of Maharlika.



**Ennie-Marie Dacut Ilasco** (xe/she), who also goes by the name Valentine, is a proud Filipinx-American university student, writer, artist, and multifandom collector raised on Tongva territory. Xe is currently working on multiple personal projects including multimedia art collections, a new blog, and more. You can find xem through her persona [@tiniest.sheep](#) on Instagram and her creative content at [@tinysheep-teahouse](#).

# Listening to Arnel Pineda on the Radio with Ma

Geramee Hensley

Big voices provide footing for little voices,  
Ma explains, as a massive voice breaches  
the passagio between chest & head—first

filling the busted Accord we're sitting  
in, then the whole garage in which the Accord  
is stranded. We're going nowhere

in the car / the garage / the house / the suburb /  
the Ohio / the America / I know the metaphor like the car  
is busted / but broken

razors are twice as deadly / all / the more / to cut  
with / Origin story: you can transfigure  
song into island. *This* is how the Philippines

was made. *This* is how Ma says "*I never  
thought I'd hear a Filipino on American radio,*"  
even though her voice shakes—like my knees,

when we, years later, climb Taal Volcano. I hurl  
my own weight over the zenith—had to dismount  
the donkey, its back buckling

under my Crisco-white ass sweltering  
in the Batangas sun—the same ass-kicking heat  
where Ma, before she's my mom, falls

in love with how Steve Perry slips  
into those high notes so she can make  
an island of his voice.

& yes, some common footing exists  
between Americanization & love,  
but, Ma, how much is our own?

My mom's love snowballs into three babies  
named after American icons:  
1) George Michael (need I explain?)

2) Gerad Martin, (after the inimitable Martin Lawrence)  
& 3) Geramee Max, a Pearl Jam & Mad Max mash-up:  
namesake for suicide & nuclear fallout. Don't call it

premonition. For instance, I believed the hike  
up Taal would kill me, but we reached the caldera's  
lake—how after, in endless rain & Quezon traffic,

I imagined death until we arrived at Rockville.  
Here, we throwback San Miguels with Arnel,  
& George asks, "*How's being a Rockstar?*"

Arnel jokes he'd rather be a porn star. Ma & Arnel  
speak Tagalog while me & my brothers stack beef  
patties up steep into our own Taal. We wrap

our jaws around sear & participate mostly  
with nods & chewing. I don't know what religion  
this is, the one of animal fat & silence

only that I am its closest disciple. Each Tagalog syllable  
reminds me, this is the language where Ma  
first learned to express love,

but not the last. We share phenome but fewer phonemes.  
When we must leave, I tell her salamat, & she says  
you're welcome:

I imagine the distance between two tongues  
is the same distance  
the dead reach back to their living.

**Geramee Hensley** is a writer from Ohio. Their work has appeared in *Button Poetry*,  
*Indiana Review*, *Hobart*, *New Poetry from the Midwest 2019*, and elsewhere. You can find them  
on Twitter [@geramee\\_](#).

# Katulong

Larisse Mondok

Ate stands in front of my framed university graduation photo—the cost of it worth more than her month’s salary. In the picture, I am made paper white to be very pretty with my hair pulled straight, softening the edges of my face, making me round and child-like. The girl in the blue garb does not look like me.

Coloring with Ate’s daughter, I watch Ate from our dining table, where for ten years, she placed the meals she cooked for our family, always waiting until we are done before eating herself—the table where my mom regularly criticized her cooking, when mom never tries making the dishes herself—where my dad threw his plate once out of anger at her, and she quietly picked up the broken pieces. The same one where she literally spoon-fed me when I was already eight, when I was too sleepy and lazy to eat by myself. I feel shame creeping up as I remember. Though if Ate remembered, she’d just laugh it off.

She points my tablet—one I gave to her because I did not want it anymore—at the overpriced memento. She receives a Facebook notification on a post she wrote about revering Duterte before I see the screen slowly mimicking a shutter closing, and the picture tucks itself in the lower right corner. Congrats, she beams at me.

Congrats, her daughter repeats.

Salamat, I want to tell them, but instead press too hard on a green crayon. Have a better life, I want to tell the girl beside me. The green breaks. I blame myself.

**Larisse Mondok** graduated with an MFA in Creative Writing at Cleveland State University. She’s a VONA Voices alumnae and a recipient of the 2018 Manuel G Flores scholarship. Follow her on twitter [@ubechislarisse](#).

# It ends with you

Kim Alexis Adversario

*Trigger Warning // rape, coming out, mental illness/suicide*

Generational trauma is a broad phrase, never elaborated.  
Used to justify our actions and thoughts,  
Blame our shortcomings and unhappiness.  
Facing the circumstances will allow us to heal.

Generational trauma is how quiet you are when you meet people-  
Never knowing if you are allowed to speak, constantly looking for permission.  
Your parents were the ones who could only speak when spoken to,  
Yet, you choose to sit back and observe until you know what is acceptable.

Generational trauma is how pious you were bred to be.  
It’s how the church took advantage of your family’s poverty,  
How your father could only go to seminary school, how you are related to nuns and priests.  
The Catholic guilt you feel is because your relatives believe they owe all successes to the Church.

Generational trauma is how adamant you are to break gender roles.  
Your mother grew up with five other sisters and an image to uphold.  
It was to keep herself attractive- no scars, smooth hair, small waist, modesty and chastity.  
You think your fight towards feminism can’t be accomplished if your own mother cannot be changed.

Generational trauma is how secretive you are about your sexuality.  
Your grandfather shuns your aunt for loving a woman and your unmarried uncle for having a child.  
There’s no need to acknowledge it if you will only hurt others.  
Not only are you afraid to come out, but your parents don’t even know you were taken advantage of.

Generational trauma is how wary you are about relationships.  
Marriage is a prison, the way your parents can never escape each other.  
Being forced to choose a side just for them to make up.  
Claiming you are too independent, but you’re just afraid to be vulnerable.

Generational trauma is how lonely you always feel.  
Your people are strong; they’re innovative despite adversity, they smile through the pain.  
Depression is weakness, just pray and move on.  
How many times have you had to talk yourself off the edge alone in the dark?

You are your ancestors, but you have unlearned.  
Dig deeper to uncover the reasons for your perspective.  
Understand in order to break the trend.  
Generational trauma will be how you choose to live your life in spite of the way you were made to feel.

This poem is about how generational trauma has been generalized as a blanket struggle with living in the diaspora. Issues you never fully understood or experiences are passed down to you. Without realizing the history and the details of your family’s fears and worries, the ability to heal is blocked. Many Filipinx love their culture, but do not know how to separate the toxicity from it. Living in the diaspora and not seeing the family in front of you, it is so easy to move on from the chains that hold us to these defaults. Yet, the differences between who you are allowed to be at home and who you are outside are because of this ability to leave the traumas behind without addressing them.

**Kim Alexis Adversario** is an undergraduate student at Arizona State University studying Political Science and History. Going into college, she felt isolated from her community and was ashamed of who she is in alignment with Filipinx traditions. As she reconnects with the community, she wants to be able to aid in decolonization and activism for Filipinx in both the United States and the Philippines. Her social media is **@adversariokim**. Her personal twitter is **@kimmywhy**.

# *love letter to morenxs*

**Jomari**

to love your skin is to love the soil  
it’s to love the soil that grows the trees  
to love the trees that shed the wood  
and to love our skin is to love this wood  
because it’s this wood that makes the home

this is the home built  
by Grandmother’s hands  
and each time she holds your face  
(holds your face in the palm of her hands)  
she holds your home within her hands

and when she kisses your skin  
your sun-kissed skin  
(because Sun loves you and your brown skin)  
she kisses the soil  
the trees  
the wood  
and loves the home built with her own hands

**Jomari** (they/he) is a Bay Area-based poet exploring love in the Filipinx diaspora identity. Follow their twitter or instagram (**@jomvri**) for photos of neighborhood plants and occasional ACNH content!



# tagalog phrases that shaped me

Dina Klarisse

## Kababae mong tao! Or *You are a girl!*

*Kababae mong tao!*

They said when I was too messy, too large, too loud,  
taking up more space  
than what their God assigned me.

Babae. Girl.

Words transformed into an outline  
of what I'm supposed to be. Luckily enough  
I have always colored with reckless abandon,  
my hands holding the markers tight, tearing  
bits of paper as I scribble away the black lines,

defenseless against my permanent color.

Kababae mong tao!

I was told when already I felt my body  
waging war against me. A monthly bloodbath,  
mounds and curves and jiggly bits emerging  
like the volcano inside the ocean of my Self  
was raging to transform the surface.

And so I grew into this strange earthly body,  
enraged and distraught that despite the lava  
inside, tectonic plates beating against my torso,  
despite the terrifying majesty of being,

a person

could be wrangled up and boxed into babae,  
and whatever the hell that is or isn't.

No direct translation but it's a universal thing,  
this feeling that we are to prod and squeeze ourselves  
into babae's mold.  
Language is hard, but I try.

“Kababae” girl  
“mong tao” *your personhood.*

A phrase to shelve me neatly among the rest:  
quiet, docile, neat, and obedient,  
because who are we meant to be  
but a piece of flesh grown from Adam's rib?

And who is God, after all,  
to say what I can and can't do  
whom I must thank for something  
I did not ask for or want. According to the books

(written and collected, of course, by Man)

I was created as an afterthought, an accessory  
born to keep His loving creation from loneliness.  
If He were real, it would be His own fault anyway,  
for giving me a brain and a thumping heart and fists  
to beat away the outlines of who I should be.



## Amoy araw, or *Smell like the sun*

*Amoy araw*, I would hear after playing outside,

“You smell like the sun”

and they would sniff my hair  
with wrinkled noses. I always wondered why  
that was a bad thing. My black hair simply soaked  
sunrays like drinking water, packing pieces of summer  
like the styrofoam takeout boxes after parties.

After hours of shrieking and running in delicious sun  
I’d be pulled back indoors, reprimanded  
for letting araw into my skin, handed Papaya soap  
And Ponds Whitening cream, as if to erase remnants  
of whatever it is inside me that allows sunrays in.

Whatever is left from before they came and told us  
that skin brown like the Earth,

who cradles and nurtures,  
is dirty and impure, less than. And they killed our gods

And inserted themselves into our words and food  
And blood and the Earth we called home.

And the years passed, so much erased  
And forgotten. Names and songs and faces buried  
under thousands of layers of whatever it is they brought.

And why should I not smell like the Sun?

When my ancestors followed stars and sky  
to the islands that sit where the Sun sings loudest  
and grows mangoes and coconuts and palm trees.

Amoy araw means that I am loved  
by that which brings us fruit and light.

I hungrily soak up araw, spreading my arms  
to catch the rays and warm me from outside-in.  
I am removed from the earth we called home  
but I am trying to get back. Diving into the ocean  
and searching for the traces in my skin  
that smell like the Sun.

## Ingat, to *Take care*

*Ingat*

sings the chorus  
at the very edge of security check,  
as close as can be to their travelers.  
Mothers and children and someone's co-nurse  
wiping tears as a loved one slips away  
across the glass barrier to another place.

*Ingat*

my mother always tells me, "Take care."  
And I often rebelled against this  
for to take care meant to take what was handed  
and given and forced onto me from my first breath.  
A forever tether to the voice and arms that held me  
from which I tried to run in search of freedom.

And it was my first act of independence  
to forget their *ingat* and live outside  
the safety and restrictions, brimming over with expectations  
of who I should be and should have been.

And in running and hiding I forgot to check  
the corners of *ingat*, wherein hides love and safety.  
A calling to travelers that their home is still home,  
despite the neon lights of that world out there.

My eyes grew weary of the neon lights and I turned  
back to that place from which I still hear their calls.

I didn't seem to notice that I am an object in orbit,  
still tethered but now distanced from which I now realize  
is home.

And like a roundtrip ticket I grasp to gravity,  
that pull that keeps me in their sight, still far but close  
enough to hear.

I now find myself saying it back, calling out  
to the chorus at the center of it all.

*Ingat*, I sing in harmony, to my mother and father  
and brothers and cousins and aunties and uncles,

The concentric circles tethered  
by a prayer or mantra or shout to the void

to take care, and to come back one day.

**Dina Klarisse** is a writer and poet living in the Bay Area. She uses words to explore/try to make sense of her experience as a queer Filipina American immigrant and recovering Catholic, as well as her interest in the intersections of history, language, culture, and identity. Her work has been published in ASU's *Canyon Voices*, *The Daily Drunk Mag*, *Chopsticks Alley*, *Kalopsia Literary Journal*, and *Emerging Arts Professionals SFBA*. More of her writing can be found on her Instagram [@hella\\_going](#) and blog [www.hellagoing.com](http://www.hellagoing.com).



# Here is the church, here is the steeple

Sara Elisabeth Morabe Murphy

I'm finding it challenging to listen to a playlist full of desert music while trying to write about being in the Philippines. It feels false. Like an unnecessary photo filter, posturing and insisting on dusty yellow orange hues on top of color that didn't need correcting. The only thing that doesn't feel wrong is the stream of constant movement that this music conjures up. The movement is constant outside the window in both memories.

I pulled these songs together specifically for solo road trips, and hearing them again now I can see the creeping rose dawn and blurred mesquite without even having to close my eyes. I don't remember what music I would have been listening to in the Philippines, aside from crackly karaoke speakers at open air bars or brassy fiesta performances at night in the Tanay town square. I'm sure I was trying to conserve my iPod battery life as much as possible and besides, it would have been rude to listen to my headphones in the car, even on longer trips between provinces and it would have been inconceivably disrespectful to pull them out in a tricycle trip. It's ok to drown everything out when you're driving alone and want to take breaks from wherever your mind takes you without having asked you in the first place. It's ok to lean on a playlist when you're stuck inside your apartment during a pandemic and want to try to steer your mind back to the country your family left but kept coming back to. Alternative transportation. It'll still get me where I'm trying to go.

So I sit here in three places at once. I'm in my car two years ago in June speeding south down Highway 5, alone and waiting for the sun to come out hot and keep me company. I'm on my couch and it's April we're still sheltering in place for however many days and I'm actively summoning memories of driving to and through Cavite. It's January 2011 and I'm in an air conditioned car looking at the blue green brown blur of trees, of the sky, of the place my grandparents were born, of a fragile jumble of houses on the edge of the sea and the outskirts of town, of the smoke of burning garbage. I'm in these three places but I'm most focused on the last, I'm honing in on being halfway through a trip halfway around the world, on the jeepney chrome and all the old churches with all their old steeples, on the fields and malls and farms and factories, on the faces of people who look like my

family because they are, on the faces of people who look like my family because this is the place my family is from this is the place my family left behind.

Yesterday I casually referenced Cavite on the phone with my mom. Made a joking reference to how lucky we each were to be able to shelter in place safely. I was trying to cheer her up, trying to make light while also reminding myself it could be worse. "And it's not like we're hiding under the floor during World War II" I said out loud, to the woman whose mother and aunts had actually done that. I said it in an attempt to be self-deprecating, to remind us how comparatively good we had it. But my chest is heavy with hot wet shame today remembering that I probably drove by that house. I saw the places my family hid. I saw the trees at the edge of the fields streak by as my mother continued narrating, "this is the edge of the town they were born in, this is near the house they lived in, oh and here is their church here is their house, here are the trees they had to climb to hide from the soldiers, near here is the good bakery with the good pasalubong with the good sapin sapin." I made a casual reference to wartime family history, during a pandemic where the word "unprecedented" has since lost meaning and heft due to overuse. We don't have enough synonyms for the unimaginable, the unfathomable and so we use what we have and do our best to make it make sense.

With some bitterness, I recognize that my grandparents and great-aunts and uncles probably didn't consider their circumstances to be "unprecedented." There is a recent enough legacy of hardship and loss in the Philippines that whatever they experienced during World War II was likely a more painful (and immediately dangerous) set of circumstances familiar to the last several generations before them. New flags same plotline. Like a bunch of sad love songs, the protagonists have different names but the general story remains the same. My desert songs are full of twangy guitar and fresh air and an echo that mimics the widest, starriest open spaces, the opposite of what it probably sounds like to squeeze your body under the floorboards, pressed against your sisters while fighting your lungs to slow shallow breaths and contain your heartbeat inside your body, your mestiza blood once again threatening to give you away. Here is the church here is the steeple open it up and find all the people.

What could it have felt like for my grandmother to survive, to be one of the first to be able to leave, thanks to the bureaucratic rubber stamp benefits afforded a Filipino family with an easily traceable American branch of their colonized tree? I only know the narrative my grandfather gave about standing on that ship as it sailed into the San Francisco Bay, but I imagine them both with lungs

**I can imagine her  
warmth, I can feel  
it when anybody  
speaks about her.**



full of fresh, cool fog. I know she loved the water, that she would take her kids out to the aptly-if-unimaginatively named Ocean Beach, thanks to my favorite aunt sharing that favorite memory. I wonder if my grandmother missed the sticky heat of her childhood, I wonder if she ever tried to chase it down. In between raising kids and helping her siblings and parents transition into America and church and divorce and drunks and her famous pancit and being the hub of our whole family, did she miss the heat, one of the few things that San Francisco can never ever provide? Did she miss being warm, even decades after leaving the Philippines? I can piece best guesses together, when I think of her and feel wistful. I can weave stories in my mind, when I'm untangling the shame I feel the day after having made jokes about what she had to survive.

I can imagine her warmth, I can feel it when anybody speaks about her. And today I wonder if they recommended the desert at any point, the way doctors did decades before to people whose lungs were also failing. But a different disease. From now. From then. In this highly unlikely overly-romanticized scenario, I imagine the doctors suggesting the dry heat as palliative care, once her lungs couldn't take any more of her second husband's secondhand smoke. In this alternate fantasy I imagine my beautiful grandmother -- the one I barely remember because I was so young when she died, the one who survived so much until she didn't -- leaving this cool grey coastal city behind. I see her moving faster than the sun, central valley fields and trees streaking by, unprecedented expanses of life ahead of her.

**Sara Elisabeth Morabe Murphy** (she/her) is a Filipinx-Irish American writer who lives in San Francisco but was born and raised in the East Bay. She is an alumna of U.C. Berkeley by way of Laney College and when she isn't working to expand SFMOMA's digital engagement and reach, she is usually reading, writing, feeling guilty about not reading and writing more, or drinking coffee. Find her on Twitter at [@heysaramurphy](#).

# MY MOTHER, MY TEACHER

Kess Costales

The first person to teach me about love was my mother.

*Mahal kita.* I learned the words while listening to the radio with her. *Why do they keep saying that? What does it mean?* I remember asking her because this was how I learned to speak her mother language. We listened to songs and I tried to sing along, but it was all gibberish in my mouth. I think she would laugh before telling me the meaning.

Though I cannot understand the language of our family, everything I know, it's from her. Words are one way to learn of love, how to express it, how to explain it. I've always wanted to get a better grasp of the language. How can I tell my family that I love them if I do not know what words I must use? How can I tell them of what I feel?

It's always been about love songs. It planted the seed of a romantic in me, but it wasn't what started my interest in love. It was seeing my parents and seeing how people cared for each other. It was seeing laughter and joy in someone's eyes when they were with another. It was always about trying to figure out what that is and what it could be and if I could understand it better.

Before I could ever fall in love, I learned about love, how unconditional it could be. How could I ever be hurt if I was loved? If I had a hand to hold and someone to speak to me, to make sense of my feelings. I will always remember the gentle way my mother spoke to me, especially when I was upset.

My memories are blurred, pieced together with developed photos taken from film cameras. My memories are short fragments of sensory details: the smell of lilacs, the feel of the pillowcase against my face, the smell of bubble baths, the warmth of the bathwater fading, the sound of the television I could hear when I woke up from nightmares.

I remembered being fearful more than I remember specific moments. A stranger in the elevator, a pair of eyes locking with mine and the electric shock that ran through me, a laugh that rattled my bones. I remember turning away and letting go of her hand, then the terror that struck. We were in the grocery store and I knew I'd be okay as long as I found her. She was never far, and I hope she never will be.

Every time I was afraid, I had her hand to hold. I never had to worry about drifting away like an untethered vessel. She was the rope that kept me at the docks, allowing me to rest and sway in my boat, unbothered by the water, knowing that she was always close when I wanted to return to land.

My mother taught me how it was to witness a broken heart. She refuses now to tell me what happened, but I know whatever it was, it hurt her so tremendously, she didn't have the words for me. She has so much love for me, she didn't want her experience to alter mine.

My mother was the one to recognize when I was at my lowest. She noticed me changing long before I noticed it myself. Without her knowledge, I would not have been able to gather the tools I needed to vanquish the demons I'd soon begin to face.

**It was seeing my parents and seeing how people cared for each other. It was seeing laughter and joy in someone's eyes when they were with another.**

She was the one to turn to me and say, *You are quiet.*

We both knew it was different than the quiet I'd been. It wasn't shyness or reservation. There was something new in my mind, like a splinter in my skin. It was burrowing deep and it would hurt more if I left it as it was. We had to do something about it. She was the one to help me take action, to decide what actions could be taken. Neither of us knew what we were facing, but this was a battle we could fight together. Maybe she wouldn't be on the field with me, but she would be wherever she could, doing whatever she can.

*You are different.* I can't remember her exact words but I remember her worry. Her heart was breaking while mine was cloaked in darkness and hurt. When I was aching, so she was. It's easy to imagine her scrambling for bandages and stitches, something to repair my wounds. It wasn't easy to figure out how to heal, but through all my fumbling, she would be there.

She was, she will be, she always is.

My mother is the source of my strength. She reminds me of my voice, of my capabilities. She taught me that I have a mind and a body if someone does not like the way I want to be loved, the fact that I believe in kindness and empathy, then they do not deserve. She taught me to see the beauty of my mind, the vastness of my imagination. She taught me to hold firm to the things that matter to me and speak up when I have something important to say.

And what's important? It's the things that matter to me. It's my belief in fairness and goodness. It's my desire to spread love and create joy and try to be better. It's my wish to inspire others, to be inspired myself, to always achieve for improvement. It's my soft-hearted nature and it's always who

I have been, who I have been nurtured to be, by my mother and her endless love.

My mother is the reason I know how to love and what kind of love I deserve. My mother makes sure I know that I should not tolerate for any less than what I want. My mother will only love the person I love if she knows they will be more than good to me, that they are what I need, and they will be the one to understand how it will affect me when she is gone one day.

I can imagine life without anyone, but I cannot imagine life without my mother.

I think that is love, the strongest I'll ever know, until perhaps I become a mother too. Perhaps that's not just a mother's love, but her love. Hers, specifically.

I know love because of my mother. I hope she always knows that.

**Kess Costales** (she/her) is a queer Filipino-Canadian author and poet represented by Lesley Sabga of the Seymour Agency. Based in Toronto, she can be found wandering in gardens and daydreaming, if she's not writing random pieces of prose at home. Her poetry collections, *SO SAYS THE HEART* and *SPEAK YOUR DARKNESS*, are now available for purchase. You can follow her on Twitter, Instagram, Wordpress, and Pinterest ([@kesscostales](#)).

# Survivor's Psalm

Christine Fojas

We walk  
on layers of forged earth  
burning the soles of our feet.

Tell me the worst is over  
that the ash has settled,  
the last ember flickering out,  
and we untangle the cloth  
wrapped around our faces  
and breathe again.

Always we are  
in the heart of the storm,  
carried far away.

Tell me the worst is over  
that the winds have died down  
and we emerge from doorways  
to pick up pieces of our lives  
among roof tiles and branches,  
plastic flotsam, unwanted gifts.

We suffer in seasons,  
in the rise and ebb  
of waves. Ghosts  
leave footprints  
across the water.  
Salt in my mouth.

Fire, earth, water, wind  
a braided whip lashing at our backs  
bent to work. Can you hear the song  
expanding in my chest?



The survivor's psalm  
a blur of wings tracing shapes  
against the blue.

Tell me we can come home again  
that there are open arms  
to come home to.

**Christine Fojas** is a Filipino-Canadian hailing from Las Piñas City and currently living in Metro Vancouver. She has a BA in Comparative Literature from University of the Philippines and works as a library technician at Douglas College. She is on Twitter and Instagram as **@chrisfojas**.



# Foxes and Coyotes

Zach Murphy

The tulips grew apart from each other that Spring. The ground cracked and crumbled in ways that I'd never seen before.

I watched the foxes and the coyotes battle all Summer on Cesar Chavez Boulevard, where the blood would leave permanent stains on the concrete. The reckless packs would flash their teeth, mark their territories, and steal more than just scraps.

Me, I was a squirrel. I was small. But I was agile. I hustled from sun up until sundown at a frenetic pace. I always minded my own business and stuck to my own path. I didn't want to get involved with the vicious nature of pack mentality.

My best friend was a squirrel, too. We grew up around the same nest. We used to climb trees, chase tails, and break soggy bread together. We'd walk the wires between safety and danger. And when we got too deep into the mess, we'd get out just in time. Growing up, I always wondered if we would live long enough to die from old age, or if the environment and its elements would get to us first.

That Fall, my best friend got caught up with the foxes and the coyotes. Now he's gone.

The foxes and the coyotes lied low in the Winter. Me, I trotted across the frozen ground and desperately hoped I'd see my best friend's footprints once again.

**Zach Murphy** is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in *Reed Magazine*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Mystery Tribune*, *Ruminare*, *B O D Y*, *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, and more. His debut chapbook *Tiny Universes* (Selcouth Station Press, 2021) is available in paperback and e-book. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.

# picking shells off of beaches

Alexis Diano Sikorski

i.  
my mother is an ocean  
away.

i wonder how it feels  
having parts of herself  
spread so far—  
does it pull? the tide?  
is it the same moon?  
does it call her  
home?

ii.  
my mother is an ocean  
in a fishbowl:

she swims & cleans &  
cares for her  
home,  
she loves & she  
stays still.  
she prays.  
she boards a plane  
sometimes,  
in someone else's arms.  
she's poured out in her  
ocean there, &  
she swims & cleans &  
cares for her  
home,  
she loves & she  
stays still.



she prays.  
she's in the place  
she knows, &  
she flows ,  
needed, well, welcome ;  
but time passes,  
& she floats  
to the surface again,  
slips into her  
fishbowl,,  
(her husband's fishbowl),,  
& she boards a plane  
in his arms.  
two days &  
she's set back on the  
kitchen table,  
where she swims  
& cleans &  
cares for her  
home,  
where she loves &  
stays still.  
where she prays.

**Alexis Diano Sikorski** is a queer Filipina-American dog mom floating around DFW, Texas, and all she wants is a really good massage. She has work in *Honey & Lime*, *The Hunger*, *TERSE.*, *Burning House Press*, *The Collapsar*, *Moonchild Magazine*, and more. She's a bit melodramatic, reads way too much fanfiction, and likes looking out of airplane windows. You can find her daydreaming or caring for her plants. **@Sikorskidear**

# A sestina for my mother tongue

Christian Aldana

I teach you my language:  
*tadhana* is the word  
for fate. I tell you it is the name of a song,  
my favorite one, I lift it from lyrics  
that don't belong in my mouth  
to polish it and place it on an altar.

I don't know the word for altar,  
but I know prayer in my language.  
*Panalangin* swirls languid in my mouth  
and never reaches my hands. I know the word  
only from memorizing the lyrics  
of a Tagalog love song.

Sing me into a Filipino song:  
your *kanta* should conjure an altar  
overflowing with offerings. Soft lyrics,  
*awitin mo* in my language  
until I become a familiar word  
that swirls in your strange mouth.

Shapeshift the tongue in your mouth  
until your Tagalog sounds like song,  
a private *harana* in every word,  
every sentence a new altar.  
To honor the music of my language  
sacrifice your own lyrics.

I teach you new lyrics—  
they sound painful in your mouth.  
*Sakit* is what we say in my language  
for the way you butcher our song.  
On a sterile English altar

*tadhana* is just a word.

*Tandaan* is the word  
for remember, *alaala ko* in lyrics.  
I collect Tagalog for my altar  
from the muscle memory of my mouth,  
I teach myself my language  
from the scraps I gather in song.

You cannot approach the altar without knowing my language.  
Your mouth scrapes over every Tagalog word.  
When you forget the lyrics, I remember I am a foreign song.

# Merienda

Christian Aldana

*For Charmaine Balisalisa*  
“Community is important to me because being able to see myself in others and others in me makes me realize how much of people/me there is to love, and I’m always astounded when I realize how much love I’m actually able to give.”

I give you a freshly crisp turon  
All brown sugar glory, caramel enveloped tropical  
Jackfruit bite melting into banana sweetness  
There is always enough room  
at this table  
For another spirit to nourish  
Here, take a sticky slice of biko  
Coconut syrup glazed malagkit  
To coat your tongue  
Eat with us until your heart is full  
At the table there is always a seat  
For you

# Pantoum for 2032

Christian Aldana

*After Carlos Bulosan, Eman Lacaba, Mila D. Aguilar, and all my kasamas.*

*“A comrade is as precious  
as a rice seedling  
fed and nurtured  
guarded from pestilence and floods”  
- Mila D. Aguilar*

This is what joy looks like:  
palm to palm, radiant, mga kasama.  
Sing like every tomorrow is infinite,  
each one of us a river, a rush, a dream.

Palm to palm, radiant, mga kasama  
smile wide and drink sunlight.  
Each one of us a river, a rush, a dream  
unfurling into a monumental sea.

Smile wide and drink sunlight,  
mga kasama. We are audacious, steady,  
unfurling into a monumental sea.  
Our life is a truth we have fought for.

Mga kasama! We are audacious, steady.  
If a storm should crescendo, remember:  
our life is a truth we have fought for,  
there is nothing more precious than you.

If a storm should crescendo, remember:  
we are millions enough for the thunder,  
and there is nothing more precious than you,  
mga kasama, holding hands, unafraid.

We are millions enough for the thunder.  
We chant, laugh, and dance in the rain,  
mga kasama, holding hands, unafraid:  
this is what joy looks like.

# Do You Speak Tagalog?

Liaa Fernandez

*after Kaveh Akbar*

I remember learning how to pronounce one  
of my mother tongues  
the way my colonizer would

English is a language  
that asks you to  
close your mouth  
shrink syllable after syllable  
until the words  
only rattle out in the  
space where  
tongue  
collides with the  
teeth

like the sound of a  
knife grinding on  
broken glass until  
every corner of your mouth is cut  
by the need to survive

until you forget  
the way your mother  
moved her tongue  
to form a kundiman  
to sing you to sleep

**Christian Aldana** (she/they) is a queer, multiracial Filipino poet, teaching artist and community organizer currently based in Chicago. She is an estranged American - born in LA but raised in the Philippines and Vietnam before returning to the US for university. She is the creator and host of Luya, a poetry organization by and for communities of color. She believes deeply in using poetry to build kapwa & community, and to educate ourselves about history. Chris has performed at venues across the United States, from theatres to universities to immigration rallies.

Her performances have been featured at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Stony Island Arts Bank, Young Chicago Authors, on NPR’s Worldview and more.

She likes her adobo with turmeric and coconut milk, her khao soi with pork, and her pho with rare beef.

Social media handles:  
**@xtian\_as** on instagram and twitter  
also **@luyapoetry**

# self-portrait without country

Liaa Fernandez

sometimes i still think i could have been her i could have been the girl  
the kundiman sings of in those old Tagalog love poems about country

instead i was born from the womb of a mother who lost her mother  
and in my girlhood i became a daughter who lost her country

at the international arrivals terminal in miami a customs and immigrations officer chuckles  
at my green card & says [i'm] *so close to becoming part of this country*

and i think he means to say when the green card is switched  
for a blue passport the music will start to make sense at least one country

will remember my name will know how to mother me  
or will listen as i translate instructions but instead it was this country

that cut open my mother's womb my first home i do not mean to sound  
like an ungrateful daughter who cannot learn to love a country

that will not love her back but maybe i am not looking  
for someone to love only a home only a country

that can contain my perpetually teenage longing for somewhere to belong  
when asked to name my desire i want for a country

that can hold me in its lap before i lose myself thinking about all the things  
i had to lose when i learned to live without my mother's country

# Ars Poetica

Liaa Fernandez

on my birth certificate in metro manila / my mother's first name becomes my second / when i begin  
catholic school in north carolina / i omit my second name from all papers / and practice saying my  
first name / with a different accent / i tear my own name in my own mouth / and this is my first  
attempt at forgetting / i ask the virgencita to forgive me for self-sabotage / go to friday mass and  
say a prayer / *holy mary mother of god pray for me a sinner now* / after all / i come from a long  
line of women / who only know how to disappear / i watch the doctors cut my mother's chest open  
/ feel my own heart tear with it / then ask my classmates in maryland to call me / [ *liaa melissa* ]  
/ i am twelve years old / the daughter of orphans / and i have never been more afraid / for the first  
time / remaining present in my own body / becomes an act of defiance / i am thirteen when i learn  
that / before i am my own person / i am somebody's daughter / they call me / [ *unica hija* ] / [ *aki ni  
melissa* ] / [ *dalagang pilipina* ] / all the names of who i belong to / are found in languages i tried to  
forget / but / when i learn that [ *liaa* ] comes from / a tagalog doctor / because my mother wanted  
me / to be a doctor / i am sixteen and do not ask her / a question i fear to be too invasive / :

*is this your way of telling me i am the one who will heal us that i must be the first to try to remember  
who we were before the world gave us too much to heal from*

**Liaa Fernandez** is a writer and activist from Metro Manila, Philippines. Currently  
based in Washington, DC, she is a 2019 alumnus of the International Writing Program's Between  
the Lines youth cultural exchange programs.



# Ma, Wag Mo Akong Iwan

Keana Aguila Labra

*after Romalyn Ante*

Okay lang, Nay,  
kasi alum ko na  
saan mag-sira  
sa inyo, pero  
I will not italicize  
their strokes:

kasi ganda ganda si  
Nanay ko, she  
a walking  
Bath & Body sample  
store at 11pm at the end  
of her swing shift,  
who combed my hair  
until I fell asleep again,  
while I just a few hours before  
on the phone with her  
crying and crying,  
please Mommy when  
are you coming home,

who tells me I am  
blooming and beautiful,  
even at my least,

who hummed and  
rubbed my back while  
I cried as she cried because  
salamat sa Diyos,  
she passed her Boards.

Na intindi ko pero  
hindi ko alum sasalita  
so ito lang:

Mahal kita, Nay  
miss na miss kita  
when you are gone,

Nay, Nay  
wag mo akong  
iwan.



November 19, 2020  
at 3:50pm  
Keana Aguila Labra

In which I write,  
*I'm losing patience for Lolo. I can't stand his selfishness and lack of appreciation.*

Beneath that,  
*Pain pills, two every 4-6 hours*

my scribbles of two tongues,  
clumsily labelled yellow for Tagalog,  
orange for Bisaya,

*Na antok ko. I wish I could take a nap. Maybe when Lola leaves, I'll take a nap on the couch. It's hard to read with the TV on.*

*Dahil - because*

pressure is a placement of time,  
pressure is proof of feeling:

*Kabuan - entirety*  
*Pagalok - offer*

There is only anger  
while I wish from the after:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jamie	Jamie	M		E	Jaden	Jaden

*Slept: 12-1:44am,  
2-5am,  
5-9am*

*minsan - sometimes*  
*palagi - always*

Mabuti palagi siya mag-buhay sa  
diary ko.

**Keana Aguila Labra** is a Best-of-Net nominated Cebuana Tagalog Filipinx poet, writer, and editor in diaspora residing on stolen Ohlone Tamyen land. She hopes to foster a creative safe space for under-resourced and underrepresented communities with her online magazine, *Marías at Sampaguitas*. She's the author of *Natalie* (Nightingale & Sparrow, 2020) and *No Saints* (Lazy Adventurer Press, 2020). Her third chapbook, *Kanunay*, is forthcoming late 2021.



# Makahiya

## Isabelle Espaldon

Between my elementary school and my house, there's a large imposing three-story house with a bold red gate that calls your attention whenever you pass by it. Spikes at the top of the gate are menacing to any would-be robbers. The design is more modern than the similar-looking houses created by the subdivision. I heard from my mother that the house was built by a wealthy balikbayan who hit the lotto in Australia.

When I was in elementary, it was a grassy patch of land filled with Makahiya plants. The name of the plants directly translates to being shy in Tagalog. I never knew of another name to call it. The leaves had a peculiar way of closing when you touched it. Every touch was a magical experience to remember. When all of the neighbourhood kids were tired of playing tag, we would stare at amazement at the plants as if seeing it for the first time.

Without fail, I would touch these plants whenever I would walk to and from school. After a particularly sad event when I lost a race, I spent almost half an hour tapping the Makahiya plants and wait as it opened up again. My mother lectured me when I got home.

I was born at the nearby city and practically grew up at Laguna for most of my life. There was nothing in my barangay that would surprise me anymore until Marian arrived at our town. She was born in the United States. It seemed so foreign and exciting to someone who had lived in the Philippines for

most of my life. Although she was quiet and shy, there was something about her that my ten-year-old self was drawn to. I quickly made it my mission to be her friend.

When I first talked to her, she spoke slowly as if thinking carefully about her words. Other than that, she was a lot more fluent than I expected. I practised talking English with her but fumble in some of the words that Tagalog words would come up ever so often. At some point, we agreed to walk home together.

On our walk, we passed by the Makahiya plants which startled Marian for a second. Her expression changed from

confused to wonder at the change of the leaves. I briefly make up stories about how I saw a fairy dancing on it to impress her. Her expression was unreadable that I abruptly stopped talking to ask about her day.

For most of the school year, we would continue walking home together. She would walk farther than

me to turn a corner to reach her house while we would pass two blocks by the grassy patch before reaching my house. An unfamiliar urge to ask my mother a question that hasn't passed my mind before. Could girls like other girls in the same way a husband and wife would? The urge passed as quickly as it came, but my question still hangs in the air. In my heart, I know the answer.

Days passed, Marian and I would walk hand in hand as we walk home from school. We fall into step with each other as soon as the teacher lets us go for the day. The answer in my heart threatened to burst forth from my mind into our reality.

"Marian...I think I like you and look up to you."

Marian's calm face contorted into confusion. Her eyebrows knit together as if I spoke in another language she didn't understand. My words felt slow and dumb coming out of my mouth. I repeated it, but her expression didn't change. Our walks usually filled with stories, and laughter instantly became silent and awkward. She started to walk faster than my pace to turn the corner. I didn't know it then, but that was the last time we would walk together.

After school the next day, I bent down to tie my shoes with my heavy backpack weighing me down. Marian walked past me with Andy who always beat me at tag. He held her things while they walk out of the school's gates. I knew instantly that I had been replaced with a new companion. The realization was bitter and metallic in my mouth.

My feet dragged as I walked home behind them. A sick, sadistic part of me wanted to see what happened between them. Before they turned the corner, Marian kissed him on his cheek before he walked across the street to go to his house. The sight made my eyes water.

That was seven years ago. My memories usually blur into each other, but these series of scenes were clear and bright in my mind. For it was the first time, I ever had a crush on a girl or anyone for the matter. It was the first memory of being a baby lesbian that I could muster.

On a particularly hot summer afternoon, I looked back on the memory with fresh eyes. My hurt seemed to dull and soften over time. The feeling was replaced with the wonder of what had happened to Marian. Her full name still rang clear in my mind. I typed the words on a search bar before fully processing what I was doing.

A series of clicks brought me to her Facebook page. A single photo made my eyes widened and filled my heart with joy. The photo was taken on a bright summer day, not unlike the one in my city. In the centre, Marian and a girl were hugging wrapped in a rainbow flag. Happy Anniversary emblazoned on the flag. Tears started to pour out of my eyes. It wasn't hurt that I felt but a supreme feeling of hope and happiness. Although, I recognized that I am a lesbian there was still a lack of acceptance in my community that filled me with bitterness in my heart. Happiness seemed such a faraway goal for me then. If Marian could be happy, I could be too.

**Isabelle Espaldon** is a writer born in Manila, Philippines and currently resides in Toronto, Canada. Like most writers, she takes inspiration from the books she loves reading and tries her best to make it her own. She can be found at [@LSABELLE26](#) on Instagram and Twitter.

# KAPRE'S CALLING

Kyle Tam

The air is still today. There are no eagles cawing overhead, no tarsiers chittering in the mangroves, and I cannot hear the villager's greetings of 'tabi tabi po' when they pass me on their way to the mountaintops. Right now the only company I have is my cigar and the gnarling branches of the balete tree I've chosen for my siesta. Or at least, they were supposed to be my only company. The sound of a cacophonous voice is cutting through the forest's silence, shrilly yammering away with no care or consideration. It seems as if Bahala himself has decided that I have other plans.

I peer over ever so slightly from my lofty perch to see what the cause of the noise might be. My ears don't deceive me. Far below, deep within my clearing, two intruders are making their way through the leafy mangroves and twisted balete trees. First through the forest is a man with skin as pale as chalk, his bright orange hair a vibrant flame amidst the greens and greys of the natural world around him. He has not stopped talking since arriving in this place, and I wonder if he was ever taught how to pause for breath. Behind him is a girl whose skin is a much healthier colour, her pitch-black brows knitted together in frustration. She speaks much less, allowing her companion's voice to fill the space around her, but her slumped shoulders and gritted teeth cannot lie to me.

Their voices don't carry the friendly tone of the village people, and the language lacks the pleasant hills and valleys of human chatter I am accustomed to. Foreigners, perhaps? I listen more carefully, to the sharp vowels and perpetual whine in the man's tone. Most definitely a foreigner. When the girl speaks, though, there is the faintest trace of the people there. It is in the sing-song tone, lilting and melodious, and the pleasant roundness of otherwise hard consonants. Her voice is their voice, but diluted by his presence, poisoned by sharp vowels and venomous barbs.

I cannot understand the words themselves, but there are certain things that are clear to me. He is angry over something, although whether that anger is just is unclear, and will not stop speaking until it is resolved or until he runs out of lies and excuses. She carries the weight of his anger onto her shaking shoulders, and the tight line of her lips smells of resignation. His voice is growing angrier and angrier, and she's beginning to shrink into herself.

This won't do at all.

I light my cigar, breathing in the spices and ash of the burning embers. It has a rich scent, reminiscent of the last and sweetest spoils of the harvest. I allow the tobacco to flood into me, tasting smoked wood, bitter spices, and the faintest hint of the other world. From my mouth I expel a curling plume of smoke and send it onwards to greet my fiery-haired trespasser. It hears and obeys, and I watch as it snakes towards the ground in slow, winding spirals, gaining in size and expanding in

scope. As the man walks forward into the ever-increasing smoke, I take the opportunity to take a puff on the cigar just for me.

It envelops the space around him, filling his world with a completely grey haze. The stranger stumbles about this way and that, no doubt trying to find some way through the obscuring mists back to civilisation. It's enough to make me laugh, the echoing sound of it making the red-head swear using what is probably the only word in the language of the land he knows. Ha! A source of endless amusement.

Now for her.

While I was spiriting her companion away in bitter smoke and peals of laughter, she was looking for him left and right, calling out for her Aiden with increasing urgency. The more I look at the girl clearly, the more I find myself drawn to her. Her hair is cut shorter than I would've expected, silky black locks straight towards her shoulder. Her eyes are wide, dark pools of colour illuminated by the colour in her cheeks. With each glance I find myself more certain of one thing. I want to meet her.

I reach towards the nearest branch with my unoccupied hand and shake it, the rattling noise making her turn this way and that before her eyes settle on the gnarled and winding branches of my napping tree. She calls out in that foreign tongue and I shake the branch harder, making her jump backwards and fall to the muddy ground in fright. One hand reaches towards her forehead, before she stops herself and calls out 'tabi tabi po' in a hushed voice.

So she does know the old ways. Very good.

I reveal myself then, in inches and shades. Enough that she can see the shadow of me on the treetops. Enough that she can see the smoke still curling out from my cigar. For now I am a silhouette, face obscured by the light of the sun, but that is all I need to be. She tries to speak to me in those sharp, ugly words, but I shake my head no. That tongue has no purpose here in my woods.

In a halting voice she hesitantly reaches for the words of the village people. Her speech is slow and stuttering, the weight of speaking the land's words no doubt heavy, but the words are coming out nonetheless. They suit her much better. She asks me who or what I am, and I ask her to guess.

A single word escapes her lips.

Engkanto.

She isn't wrong, but she isn't quite right either. Still, for a child who is reaching backwards for the words of her people, it isn't bad at all. I descend from the winding embrace of the balete tree, feeling her burning curiosity on my back. I have always wondered what goes on in the minds of mortals, when I unveil all of myself. When they see me, as tall as two men and skin dark as the damp earth they sow their seeds beneath, do they fear me? When they hear my voice that rumbles



like thunder and echoes all through the forest, do they loathe me?

When they know me, could they ever come to love me?

There is a breath, a thought, hitched in her throat as she gazes upon all that I am. She looks upon me without teary eyes, trembling lips, or quivering knees, and I do not understand why or how. Then I see the fading marks on her neck, yellow tinged with blue and purple, and I do. She picks out her words delicately and carefully but their order is jumbled and obscured, her sentences present and past all at the same time. Still, the gist is clear.

She asks me if the stories are true.

I tell her that it depends, really, on the stories.

She presses me further and asks, the ones where you play tricks on people?

I say to her only sometimes, when the mood takes me.

What about, she asks, the ones where you fall in love with human women?

I grin, exposing my yellowing teeth stained with tobacco and liquor. That question I cannot answer, and she knows well enough to not pursue it any further.

The words of the next question are there, on the tip of her tongue and back of her mind, but she keeps starting and stopping her train of thought before defaulting to two words. Nais bato.

Nais... bato. Wish rock?

Ah. Of course.

I tell her to close her eyes, but she doesn't quite comprehend my words, so I mime using my fingertips to shut my eyelids. She understands and closes her eyes, holding her hands out. Clever girl. Too clever for the markings on her neck and the bags beneath her eyes.

From the ground beneath my feet I pick up the first stone I see and place it into her waiting palms. It is an unassuming stone, half the size of my palm and smoothly polished, almost as if it were waiting to be held. If one were to look closely enough, you would find it sparkling at just the right angle in the sun.

Wishing stone indeed.

If there is one flaw in the people of this land, it is their overabundance of hope. It has sent weeping wives, blood-drunk warriors and all manner of businessmen my way, searching for fabled cure-alls and desperate bargains. For the unworthiest ones are the smoke from my cigar and my laughter echoing behind them. For the ones I like, more deserving or more in need, I only wish there was more I could do. Still, there are some wishes that I can make come true.

After all, it's a heavy rock, and a person's skull can be quite delicate.

**Kyle Tam** is a transport planner by day and an author by night. Her work has been published in *Monstronomicon* from Haunted House Publishing, and is forthcoming in *Idle Ink*, *Fudoki*, *Mineral Lit Mag* and *Murder Park After Dark Vol. 3*. She's never been scared of balete trees, only curious about what's in them.

# foreign bodies

Thomas Abalahin

every so often  
your heart  
your lungs  
your blood and bones  
forget they are themselves  
and you move through space  
like an intruder  
strange in movement  
cautiously sneaking  
across paths  
you should know

and every so often  
your tongue  
your nose  
your eyes and ears  
catch sight of home  
in another person's  
piping hot meal  
and your stomach  
knows ache like  
spoons know soup

and thus you sit down  
at a little lunch counter  
and the steam of the bowl  
reminds your body  
how to be warm  
again

kain na, anak

# heart of palm

Thomas Abalahin

kin of my blood  
bone of my heart  
do you know you are still alive?  
the flesh beneath your ribs  
may have given way  
to a red May  
but you still speak  
three generations hence  
*sa awa ng Diyos*  
with God's mercy  
your heart embalmed  
your heart of palm  
borne of a far off province  
where rivers and arms both  
bent and broke ground  
this was your aim  
your thoughts embodied  
beyond the hardships  
of the mortal coil  
*freedom from want*  
do you know you are still alive?  
that you were as dust in the attic?  
and suddenly you walked again?  
do you know you are still alive?  
your naivety repeated a thousand times?  
and someone clutches you to their chest?  
do you know?  
there are roots that ache for earth far and away?  
that there is still a waxing lust for home yet not home?  
that there are still those who yearn yet do not know?  
what did you see in the ginkgo leaves?  
that fan out onto your  
wide American earth?

# all american

Thomas Abalahin

“were you born here?”  
“no  
I was born in \_\_\_\_\_”  
|||||||  
a rehearsal of lines  
repeated  
|||||||  
“you don’t seem like you were born there though”  
“how so?”  
    <O)  
    / ) )  
==#==  
in the distance  
a single crow  
    (O>  
    / ) )  
==#==  
“I don’t know, just the vibe you give off”  
“yeah, I get that a lot”  
~~~~~  
but do you get that?  
I want to get that  
~~~~~

Hailing from Tacoma, Washington, **Thomas Abalahin** (he/they) is a recent graduate of the UW. A 1.5th generation Filipino-American, they are currently looking to work in youth counseling, though in the future they hope to go to grad school for Filipino American studies or clinical social work practice. You can find them on Instagram **@tomasito\_d** or on Twitter **@tomasino\_d**.

# the brown girl's burden

Rodlyn-Mae Banting

before we fucked he said  
he was scared he wouldn't  
be able to match my intensity  
so I wedged my spine between  
the couch cushions so he'd  
know I stood for nothing.  
months later, when anxiety  
was no longer a prerequisite  
of lust he told me he was scared  
to be on the other side of  
my wrath, those ballistic  
fragments of magma<sup>1</sup>  
the terrifying beauty  
of its continued eruption<sup>2</sup>  
and so I swallowed all my  
molten rage until my lungs  
were instead an ash-ridden sky.  
when I was sixteen  
I paddled into the heart  
of Taal Lake, the surrounding  
fauna an areolan respite  
the weary horses standing guard  
to that open-mouthed beak  
lest she protest too much  
and watched as my sunglasses  
toppled off the side of the canoe.  
I shrieked and jumped in  
after them, my necessary  
shield against the potent sun  
my panic becoming one  
with the steaming water  
when I remembered that  
the lake was in fact also a volcano  
its dormancy a stroke of luck  
an arbitrary forgiveness.

I want to love my country  
with the same ardency  
with which I love white men  
my disappearance somehow  
a simultaneous becoming  
my willful folding  
a pledged allegiance to  
the bluest eye I know  
will never protect me  
will always think me savage.  
I want to fear its loss so much  
that I will always swim on  
after it, sifting beneath the  
lightning sky, even if it leads  
to the bottom of a crater  
that is also a bowl  
waiting to consume me.

---

<sup>1</sup> Description in a CNN report after 2020 Taal volcanic eruption

<sup>2</sup> DW News Germany broadcast of 2020 Taal volcanic eruption

# Severance Package

Rodlyn-Mae Banting

*Content Warning: Graphic imagery relating to genitalia*

*“If a crew member loses his penis, he’s paid \$20,900. If a worker dies: \$50,000. The maximum payout, for permanent disability, is capped at \$60,000.” —The California Sunday Magazine on the policies for Filipino seafarers aboard Carnival Cruise Line ships.*

When I first met your best friend,  
she turned to me and said,  
“I can already tell how good you are for him,”  
as if I was the antidote to your sadness,  
a manic pixie Nightingale expedited  
from a hospital overseas,  
ready to embrace the carnage.

Months later: on our last night,  
when your father asked to speak with me,  
your sorrow still damp on my blouse,  
I rose to greet a sullen jury  
but instead he grabbed me  
by the elbows and said,  
“Thank you for taking care of him.”

So later, when we sat in the garden  
and found a bird on the ground  
dead and crawling with ants,  
I could not tell if my instinct  
was to weep or wipe its ass,  
could not tell if it was my duty  
to clean up its blue-green mess  
or if this made me a carcass too:

Disposable like my forefathers  
who joined the U.S. Navy  
and beamed just to learn  
that they were busboys.  
Like my brothers who boarded  
the cruise ships and hustled  
below the docks because their  
severed dicks were worth more  
than a month’s pay.

Where is my metaphorical dick?  
Does it make me a real one  
if I choose not to  
only take care of you?  
Does it make me a sinner to  
redirect the blood flow to  
the beating of my own heart?

And even later: when you waved me off  
at security, standing at the shore  
of my devotion, the lines drawn so sharply  
I could taste the sea in my mouth,  
I could not tell if it was you or I  
who sighed in relief knowing that love  
does not come with a severance package.

**Rodlyn-Mae Banting** is a Filipina writer born and raised in New York. Her work has appeared in Z Publishing’s *Maryland’s Best Emerging Poets* (2018), *America’s Best Emerging Poets* (2018), *The Baltimore Sun*, and *Friktion Magasin*. She is currently a master’s candidate in UW-Madison’s Gender & Women’s Studies Program. Her hobbies include baking, reading, and cuddling with her cats. You can follow her on Twitter at [@fmnstmelodrama](https://twitter.com/fmnstmelodrama).



# Mama

## Kiana Triana

*Mama, what was it like in the Philippines?*

She stares intently at her TV screen, using her controller to expertly take on the final boss. I got my competitiveness and love of video games from her. I got my sarcasm, and my stubbornness, and my sense of humor from her. I did not get her eyes, or her hair, or her nose. But there is no doubt that we are family.

She wins, of course. Pleased with herself, she winds the cord around the controller, not too tight, and places it gently on top of the console, so no one will trip on it. She stands up and stretches. “Baby, what do you want for lunch?” Her thick accent sounds like home.

*Mama, why did you move to America?*

“I’ll eat whatever you have, Mama,” I respond cheerily as I follow her to the kitchen.

She makes her way slowly, shuffling her slippered feet along the carpet. The top of her head comes up to my eyeline, now. Her wavy hair is short, just above shoulder length, as it always had been. She used to always dye it black, covering up the graying roots, but she hasn’t now in months. Maybe even a year. I remember her birthday, but I can never remember how old she is. I don’t really want to.

“We have leftover sinigang and kare-kare, or I can fry some eggs and spam if you want.” Her voice is muffled slightly by the fridge door before she closes it, looking expectantly at me.

“Kare-kare sounds good!” Mama never lets me help her cook.

She makes no move to get the food, and instead raises her eyebrows at me skeptically. “Are you sure? I thought you don’t even like kare-kare.”

I shrug nonchalantly. “It’s grown on me.”

She still stares at me. “Baby, I can make you eggs and spam.” She begins preparing to cook, taking

out the eggs, spam, and frying pan.

“Mama, it’s okay!” I insist, “I’m fine with kare-kare.”

She turns and stands squarely facing me. “*Baby*,” in a tone not to be argued with, “I know you, and I know you want eggs and spam. So I’ll cook you some.” She returns to preparing the food.

“Alright,” I relent, “but at least let me slice the spam.”

Mama chuckles. “Okay, baby.”

As we prepare the food, she begins to gossip. “Your Ninang called me yesterday. She said that Tito Joe and Tita May visited Guam and didn’t even call her!”

*Mama, what was it like in Guam?*

“That was pretty rude of them,” I reply, getting utensils ready. I don’t really know Tito Joe or Tita May. They live far, and travel infrequently. But they are family.

“I know, right?” Mama is happy to share the drama. “She saw them post on- eh, what’s it called? That Instagram? They posted a picture and she saw it.”

“Tito Joe and Tita May use Instagram?”

Mama laughs uproariously. “No, no, Lisa posted it!” she clarifies, as if this were an obvious fact I should have deduced.

“Who’s Lisa?”

Mama jokingly slaps my arm. “Your cousin, *duh*!” She laughs more.

*Mama, are you happier in America?*

The spam sizzles in the pan. We both like it crispy. Mame carefully places the still hot meat onto a paper towel-covered plate. In the leftover grease, she begins to fry eggs, two for each of us. She makes them perfectly, with delicate golden brown edges and a runny yolk. I can never make them as good as her.

I bring over the Jufran as we move to the dining table. I make sure to put a placemat under my plate.

On the wall, behind the seat that is always mine whenever am I here, hangs a small carving of The Last Supper. Mama sits on the side closest to the kitchen counter. I remember being small enough to run under that counter.

Before Mama takes her seat, she turns on TFC, her favorite channel. I watch without understanding.

*Mama, can you teach me Tagalog?*

We start in the middle of a dramatic movie, but Mama has seen them all before.

Mama explains to me, “This lady, her family is falling apart. Her husband cheated on her. Her whole life is a mess. You know why?”

She knows I don’t, but still waits for my response.

“Why?”

**I remember her birthday, but I can never remember how old she is. I don’t really want to.**

She leans in. “Because she stopped praying and believing in God. Remember, baby, we need to pray every night, so He keeps us safe, and makes the world better. ” I nod along.

In Mama’s bedroom, on top of her dresser, she has a mini shrine of sorts. There’s a picture of the Virgin Mary, a little bottle of holy water, and a few other pieces of Catholic paraphernalia. As

a child, this shrine was mysterious and enchanting to me. The dresser was very high, and the top was unreachable for me. Now, I can easily see and touch everything in the shrine. But I never do.

*Mama, who goes with you to church?*

Mama falls silent as she becomes engrossed in the film, despite the innumerable times she must have seen it before. She watches the screen intently, brow furrowed, clearly invested in the fictional drama. I got that from her, too.

*Mama, do you know how much of you is in me?*

The bells on the front door jingle as it opens. My mom and my ninong come in, talking and laughing, bearing bags of groceries. They stop in the entryway, taking off their shoes and socks. My mom calls

me over to help put groceries away. Mama gets up to help, too. We tell her to sit down and relax, but she stubbornly insists that she needs to supervise the organization of her own kitchen. I don’t argue with that, though my mom tries to.

After the groceries are put away, it’s time to go. Ninong lives with Mama, so she won’t be alone.

“Bye, baby,” she hugs me tight before I leave. It still feels so strange to rest my head on top of hers, instead of against her chest. Her embrace is soft and warm. “Mahal na mahal kita.”

“I love you too, Mama.”

**Kiana Triana** (she/her) is a writer, actress, and social justice educator who can never find time to read all the books she can’t stop buying with money she doesn’t have. When she’s not working or struggling through writer’s block, she’s usually playing video games, taking an undeserved nap, or reading (finally). Instagram: **@kiana.triana**, Twitter: **@kianatree**

# Kuir

## Halcyon

I can be queer without touching you.  
I can be queer without holding you.  
Without smelling you.  
Or ever tasting you.

I might forget  
how the light weaves itself through the knots in your hair  
or the dimples of your stomach, frowning from its weight;  
how your hand, lying upon your waist,  
rests flat and still.  
But you could look right through me,  
gazing back into a black mirror,  
and freeze time with your eyes alone.

Though I never saw the sunlight  
melt into your goosebumps...  
Yes--  
even then,

I can be queer without touching you.  
I can be queer without seeing you.  
I can be queer if I never hear your honeyed voice again.  
I would remember the sweetest words anyone has ever spoken to me.

For it was never my flesh you held,  
but every thread of my unloved being  
shredded from the darkness  
of my burning core.  
This,  
you will always have.

*Kuir is simultaneously published with the Walang Hiya Collective.*

**Halcyon** (they/them) is a non-binary, queer artist of Mexican and Pin@y descent. They're also an online sex worker, student, and artist. Their work centers the erotic and sensual, as these are realms they believe to be some of the most powerful in reclaiming one's sexuality, spirituality, and autonomy. They advocate for the re-indigenization of our cultures, land, and communities as well as the dismantling of our imperial and capitalist systems that reign transnationally.  
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# Someday

## Laetitia Nicole S. Franco

The sun is shining  
brighter like your smile,  
tantalizing in my eyes

I wish we could be together—  
falling in love  
just like the other lovers in town

Staring at each other's eyes  
displaying affection right in their sights  
Oh, how I wish

Desiring for  
your kiss

Fancy remembering  
our stolen moments that  
even thieves couldn't snatch

Those great memories

I want to shout at the rooftop  
Tell the world how much  
I crave for your embrace

How much I long for those lips  
To comfort me in the night  
They are the medicine I'd be willing  
To be overdosed by

I want the universe to know  
That your hands are my remedy  
And my blanket when it's cold

They are my safe haven  
I wish they'll realize

I want them to see  
How much I care for you

I'd be willing to offer anything  
Just to cure any of your wound  
Please forgive me  
For I cannot let them see  
How much you mean to me

I cannot hold you in my arms  
Like those lovers we see in the park  
Or those portraying in a play

Our love is meant to be in the backstage  
Where the lights are dimmed  
And there are no audiences

Forgive me for I couldn't hold your hands  
nor look at your eyes  
because whispers are louder than bombs

They'll come to us  
Unwanted  
On an unexpected time

They will ask questions  
We never know the answers  
Or are we just afraid to speak out?

Rumours flow freely with the wind  
and gazes are pierces we're not  
aware of  
I'm sorry, I'm afraid

We both are cowards in this world

I hope you'll still look for me  
when you pass by the street  
wave your hands in the air just like  
old times

One day I promise

We wouldn't care  
I'll hold you in my arms  
Like nobody's there

I aspire to spend my future with you  
drinking a cup of coffee or tea  
minding who we really want to be

We'll make our own world  
Where the two of us are free—  
One day we'll be  
welcomed wholeheartedly  
in this society

**Laetitia Nicole S. Franco** (she/her) is a Student from the Philippines. A dreamer, an aspirer bravely chasing her dreams.



# Mahalaga

Phebe M. Ferrer

this is how i say  
important  
in mother's tongue  
with deep vowels  
flushed cheeks  
shaky voice

this is my language

every single  
vowel  
intonation  
pause  
conveys meaning

Mahalaga  
i care about you  
you are important to me  
i love you

Mahalaga  
understanding why  
we are here  
instead of home

Mahalaga  
parents wanting  
better lives  
for my sisters  
and me

Mahalaga  
knowing why  
grandfathers  
left their families

Mahalaga  
empty seats  
at the table's head

Mahalaga  
growing under  
strong mothers

Mahalaga  
because love  
is costly

Mahalaga  
a family tree  
stretched over  
three continents

Mahalaga  
leaving  
always leaving  
i want to stay

Mahalaga  
learning to let go  
of hands  
i've held  
for so long

Mahalaga  
understanding why  
i had to leave

Mahalaga  
uncertainty



Mahalaga  
they tell me  
the snow welcomes me  
while others wonder  
why the snow  
from winter clings  
to the spring

Mahalaga  
everyone around me  
is pale like  
the snow

Mahalaga  
someone else here  
with skin like  
davao chocolate

Mahalaga  
a settler  
on unceded land

Mahalaga  
how do i pay  
my dues to  
this land  
its people  
their stories

Mahalaga  
because love  
is an action<sup>1</sup>

Mahalaga  
finding i can  
stand alone  
not always lonely

Mahalaga  
wanting love

Mahalaga  
moving  
again and  
again and  
again and

Mahalaga  
growing up  
losing  
wanting  
leaving  
so much  
crying

Mahalaga  
they told me  
my skin is like  
fertile soil  
where flowers grow  
and stay  
and bloom

Mahalaga  
still unsure  
of who i am  
where i am going  
but surely i am  
growing

# I am descended from wanderlust

Phebe M. Ferrer

Of feet stepping beyond their bounds  
Of eyes lingering beyond the horizon  
Of bodies that stretch beyond, away  
From here

I claim a lineage of yearning  
Convinced of oceans in our veins  
Who call us like sirens  
To doom or salvation  
We sail on

I inherited seasick blood  
Not content with standing still  
I am shaking  
To contain all  
Its possibilities

I remember my heritage of movement  
Learning to walk on water  
To tread immigration forms  
Twist my mouth to say about

Because migration is possibility  
Asking for more is survival

I am reminded that oceans connect  
Than divide  
How they extend my fingertips  
To reach yours



<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, *All About Love*

I learned that wanderlust runs in my veins  
- my mother’s words  
That my lolo the seafarer went farther  
Than my father the diplomat ever has

I imagine it began as dinner table words  
*Anak, alam mo ba*  
*Ang lawak ng ating mundo*  
*Nakita ko lahat*  
*Ipapakita ko din sayo*

I’ve seen the photos  
The way lolo held my dad’s hand in Iran  
Is the way dad held my hand on the plane  
Trust that this winged cylinder ripping through the sky  
Will mean stable footing on the other side

There are stories hidden in lolo’s body  
In the nooks of the photos  
Of my dad, his brothers, my lola  
*Umalis kami bago nagsimula ang rebolusyon*  
*Marami akong nakilala sa barko*  
*Una kaming nagkita sa Maynila*  
I search for them in his face  
In the bisaya I don’t understand

When I place my lolo into revolutions  
History becomes dinner table tsismis

I settle him into pages  
Written by pale hands  
And dye them brown



Sometimes  
Wanting to leave  
Feels complicit in  
Lost mothers  
Distant fathers  
Broken families  
Dead caregivers

All for  
Escape



*Anak, alamin mo*  
Wanderlust cannot sustain you  
Will not protect you

Mom taught me her tenacity  
*You must fight for yourself*  
*Life will not always be kind to you*  
Whether it’s racists or bills or lost friends  
You hold yourself up

Growing up, Mom hid  
Tears in her hugs  
In the sinigang  
Racism wore her down  
While I laughed in the playground  
Unaware

I learned strength looked like silence  
Looked like stand-in parents  
Looked like don’t walk in the alley way  
Looked like fresh sausage rolls on London hills  
Looked like tightly held hands

Mom, I don’t feel strong enough yet  
My palms are still soft  
My heart still too kind

I can’t show you this poem yet



*Postscript:*

Lolo,  
When I come back  
You always tell me to leave

I know you care for me  
I know I don’t want to stay

You push me into the ocean  
To save me from choked air  
Here, I drift without you

So I learn to hold myself like the shore



*Post-postscript:*

Wanderlust does not exempt me from responsibility.

Calling all settlers on unceded and stolen lands.  
Did you see the sign declaring ‘time immemorial’?  
Did you greet your host?  
Did you say paalam on your way out?

**Phebe M. Ferrer** (she/her) is a poet living in Vancouver, Canada, on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. Having just finished her Master’s degree, she is currently exploring poetry as a medium of writing and expression. As someone in diaspora, Phebe strives to honour both the joy and pain, resilience and separation, that coexist in diasporic stories through her writing. You can find her growing collection of work at [phebemferrer.wordpress.com](http://phebemferrer.wordpress.com). Social media handles: [@phebses](#) on Instagram and Twitter

# Bangungut

Michelle Gan

We are our ancestors’ wildest dreams. We are the books they didn’t have time to devour, the stories they weren’t able to tell, the songs they were never able to sing. We are the graduations they never dreamed of attending, the places they did not know existed, the competitions they never won. We are their dreams deferred. We are the seeds they carried in the hems of their skirts and the curves of their backs, planted by our parents in foreign lands. We remind them of the homes they have left. We are the grandchildren that their parents will never really know. They toiled, they settled, they saved, so we could live.

We are what they wanted us to be: educated, middle-class, secure. We are doctors and lawyers and professors. We studied what felt stable. We made our fashion designs, short stories, and snowboarding passion projects and side hustles. We followed the maps they had drawn for us, guiding us to their version of success. No longer.

We talk to our parents. We tell them we are quitting our perfect lives. We are finding ourselves. “What does that mean? Are you lost?,” they ask. We don’t quite know. We decide this means returning to our roots.

We traverse oceans and arbitrarily set borders to return to our homelands. We retrace the steps of our parents’ journey, but nothing is the same.

We live like tourists. We find ourselves in clubs with so many foreigners that it doesn’t even matter that we don’t speak the language. We climb to the highest peaks and towers – how else can we best see where we really come from? We think this bird’s-eye view will give us the perspective we need. We swim in turquoise waters on the whitest of beaches. Water is cleansing, and we want to be reborn. We shop ‘til we drop; we do not know how to stop. Everything is so cheap, and we are stimulating the local economy. We convince ourselves that consumption is connection.

We visit temples and churches. We reach new levels of spirituality. We light candles, praying to anybody who will listen. We hop in and out of air-conditioned Ubers—we are getting to know the

locals. We take photos of ourselves in these places—we are connected to this land and we need others to see and understand that. We take photos of the locals—who better than us who have finally returned to tell their stories?

We eat. We eat so much, like maybe if we swallow enough native vegetables we will feel like we too deserve to grow and flourish here. We don’t realize we are swallowing weeds.

We are our ancestors’ wildest dreams. But maybe we are also their nightmares.

**Michelle Gan** (she/her) is a writer and photographer whose work has previously been featured in the *South Side Weekly* and *Sliced Bread Magazine*. Follow her on Instagram at **@ganwiththewindd** and on Twitter at **@michellegan\_**.

# The sound of silence

Geraldin Devarras

Trigger Warning: language insinuating abuse

Face is bright  
smile is shining  
Clouds are clear  
a peaceful life

And then darkness came  
Someone barged  
Into my life

He overruled my body  
With hands tied up  
In the bed, mouth gag  
And silent cries

Screams that wanted to be heard,  
I was not the only one,  
we are many

I’ve been silent  
all the time  
with rough fingers  
around me

He’ll come to us,  
I don’t want to look  
In his dangerous eyes  
That could kill me

This sound of silence  
It’s suffocating, and  
Deafening

One day,  
it would be Loud voices  
that will be heard  
By many

Not the sound  
Of silence that is  
Heard by no one  
But myself.

**Geraldin Devarras** (she/her) is an aspiring Filipina writer and loves to write free verse poems.



# I Loved The Way You Loved Me

Margaux V. Generao

I knew  
I loved you  
When everything I avoided  
forced  
their way through  
When instead of leaving as soon  
as the pain came,  
I sharpened my eyes,  
and focused my aim

I knew I loved you  
That night  
your callused hands held  
my candle-like  
The feel of you  
pressed on my side  
made me feel safer  
You were my warmth in the  
cold  
when I was barely  
keeping my shit together

I knew I loved you  
When I wasted  
6 whole fucking months trying  
to understand  
your heart  
But I couldn't stop  
because you are addicting,  
you're  
art  
I stayed even if we're running

to the cliff,  
doomed  
from the very start

I knew I loved you  
When you hurt me, and I  
hurt you  
When we couldn't stand  
each other's presence  
and silence  
filled the air  
But we never had the guts to admit  
that our minds were always angry, but  
our hearts still care

I just loved  
the way you loved me  
It was toxic and problematic,  
it massacred  
the soul outta me  
It weakened my strong,  
and fooled my clever  
I LOVED the way you  
loved me  
because it just showed me,  
I deserve a love  
way better.

I loved you,  
I truly loved you and the way  
you loved me  
But I will never  
ever go back  
to what once broke me  
I loved you like the sun in the sky but  
all I received was ACID rain  
I just loved  
the way you loved me,  
it showed me that losing you  
wasn't a loss,

but a gain.

# Sonnet 3

Margaux V. Generao

The fruit was forbidden, but I took a bite  
We were cursed when I gave in to your glow  
The risk I took drowned the serpent in fright  
When God warned me, I said shut up, I know

I leaped when the step was to turn around  
Short heels clicked while damaging feelings loomed  
Amidst the black, you're as bright as my gown  
We're strong, solid buds... until flowers bloomed

When I froze my heart, you set it ablaze  
When I ignored who tried to talk, you sang  
My rules were intense, but so was your gaze  
With love comes blood smeared on the boomerang.

Your eyes, my laugh, every lie was a clue  
To my crime; I broke my own rules for you.

**Margaux V. Generao** (she/her) is a Humanities and Social Sciences student at the School of Saint Anthony in Lagro, Quezon City. She is also the current Editor-in-Chief in English of the School of Saint Anthony's official publications, the *Sapientia et Virtus/ Ang Paglalayag*, for almost 2 years now. Being in the field of Campus Journalism since elementary, Margaux was exposed to the social, political, and economic agents that shape the realities of people at a young age, which is why as an adolescent in the journey of finding her purpose and role in society, her heart developed a soft spot for the marginalized and oppressed people—of all ages, genders, and race—in society. She found both a passion and a calling to give voices to these people through her writing.

She can be contacted through her email address [generao.margaux@gmail.com](mailto:generao.margaux@gmail.com), her Facebook account **Margaux Generao**, or her Instagram account **@margxau**.

# The Spirit Tree's Story

Resi Ibañez

## I. Roots

I am descended from rice terraces  
volcanoes, and mountain weavers  
From musicians and teachers  
Salsa dancers, line dancers, and eyebrows  
arched with chismosa.

From every bird in the Southeast Asian field guide  
listed as  
unmistakable,

I  
am unmistakable.

Like waking up  
to the smell of ripe maduros being fried  
for Saturday morning's breakfast -

I am descended from gold.

Unmistakable,  
like the sequins on the line dancing instructor's shirt  
in the church basement after Sunday Mass:

Be the glitter  
that makes the world want to dance.

## II. Branches

Be the glitter  
that sparkles with resonance  
that makes the world want to dance -  
Don't deny your iridescent music

that sparkles with resonance,  
your bioluminescence.  
Don't deny your iridescent music -  
shine your light on the world,

your bioluminescence:  
the world is here for it.  
Shine your light on the world.  
We are descended from gold -

and the world is here for it:  
hoop earrings, your name in gold filigree.  
We are descended from  
your soul made of glitter,

hoop earrings, your name in gold filigree -  
look up at the night sky.  
Your soul is made of glitter.  
Demand that kind of reverence.

Look up at the night sky I say:  
be that glitter.  
Demand the kind of reverence  
that makes the world want to dance.

# Jupiter

Resi Ibañez

One of my favorite stories  
about your childhood  
is how your dad would make you  
stand outside  
and identify three constellations  
every night

I've tried studying constellations  
on my own

but I can only pick out one, usually

you and I  
have stood outside together  
so many times  
looking up for  
recognizable shapes

you help me see more

tender stars

it must be so exhausting  
for them  
to shine their best  
even as they are vulnerable  
even as they are tired  
from sending their light and energy  
all over the universe

just so other beings  
millions of lightyears away  
can look up  
and feel at peace

how do they do that?  
how do you do that?



day after day  
night after night

expending your precious energy  
on those around you

all the while fighting  
through dark clouds  
asteroid belts  
black holes  
you give me proof  
that we are all made of stars

you are an amazing galaxy  
and you help me see more  
you help me see  
that I am one too

and together we can take on the universe

I told you once  
that I reach for words like stars  
you give me stars to reach for

every place you kiss me  
is another new bright star in my own galaxy

and we can take on the universe  
because we are creating it ourselves

it is a symphony

I've told you about the marching band show I did  
my senior year of high school  
Gustav Holst's *The Planets*

the final movement was "Jupiter"  
and we had points taken from our score  
because we used confetti

you and I are that movement  
we are the defiant confetti on the ground  
ignoring the naysayers  
being sparkly as all hell  
that judges who don't know any better  
say we should be in

but they don't know  
the sounds stars make  
when they come into existence

they don't know how fabulous it all is  
how there are prisms of colors  
that shine all night  
how they carry sound waves emphatically  
triumphantly  
across the universe

even through dark clouds  
asteroid belts  
black holes

we are all made of stars





yours is a galaxy I never want to stop exploring  
ours is a universe I want to keep building

where stars shine bright as confetti  
and light years don’t matter:

tender moments between us  
are as triumphant  
as the most melodic and vulnerable section  
of Jupiter’s movement

which Holst called “the bringer of Jollity”

we are so good at bringing the fabulous jollity  
to each other

but creating a universe with you  
happens in the quietest most tender moments  
and that sounds like

some amazing kind of magic

it sounds like  
proof that we are all made of stars

you and I are some kind of  
unexplained phenomena  
we are more magic  
than the big bang can explain

together we are creating  
something bigger, more fabulous, and more amazing  
than this world has ever seen

we are creating a symphony  
more tenderly melodic  
more triumphantly vulnerable  
than this world has ever heard

and that kind of magic  
deserves all the confetti in the air,  
all the confetti on the ground,  
all the stardust  
in our breath and bodies

# Love Letter to My Hips

Resi Ibañez

Hips, I love you.

I love you when you move the earth. When you sway and smoothly sashay me from place to place,  
When you are my sixth sense. When you detect rhythm and tempo. When you lift my feet in time and  
drop the stomps in a weighted syncopated six count salsa

*1-two-3 4-five-6*

When you accent the tempo on the dance floor,  
when you help me articulate music, translate sound to my body —  
Hips, if music is a universal language, then you are a native speaker.  
When you are the center of my body universe, my root, my sacral chakra, you give me gravity.  
You move the earth, the wind, the skies and clouds,  
you are not afraid to move. You are not afraid to speak, you are not afraid to take up space  
when I began to understand my gender identity, you spoke to me:  
I am a butch who is not afraid to dance, forget what everyone else says because

Hips, you are my god given right to speak rhythm  
Hips, you are my god given right to speak love  
Hips, you are my god given right to speak truth

I claim you as you move me  
Move me to a place where gender does not matter  
where music speaks loudest and  
the only thing that matters is melody, tempo, bass, percussion  
And gender euphoria is the stereo turned up to 11 -  
where we dance like no one is watching because I don’t care --

Hips, I love you for not speaking gender.  
Speak *music* to me.  
Speak *curves*.  
Speak the language of bodies  
making their own music,

the language of melody, tempo, bass, percussion  
Speak curves like sound waves  
crescendoing and crashing like cymbals  
on the ocean of skin, the ocean of a dance floor:

Dear hips,  
You taught me to never lie  
and the truth is this:  
you say things my mouth never could and  
I love you.

# I Swallowed Them Whole

Resi Ibañez

My best friend is a dockworker named Jonah. They and I met one night, as the last ferry pulled away into the bay. It was a cold Maine November night, and their car, isolated in the parking lot, wouldn't start. Late fall snowflakes were drifting down over Casco Bay, in an incredibly dark night, lit only by some stars above and the slow dots of distant warm light, bobbing from the exposed bulbs on the receding ferry boat deck.

The ferry bells were clanging from a farther and farther distance, and Jonah was stuck. They'd try to start their car, only to be met by the raspy sound of an engine that was tired from trying too hard. The ferry lobby was already locked, and it was too late in the night to check in at any place in downtown Portland.

I was feeling pretty cold that night too. The corrugated metal wall of the warehouse I am painted on is freezing in the late fall. My mouth is painted over a door in the warehouse wall. This warehouse stomach of mine is empty, abandoned. There hasn't been anyone seeking refuge in my multi-chambered stomach in a long time. Not since I can remember existing, not since I can remember my first memory in 1993.

It was a different scene then. A hot, sunny summer. I remember coming into life slowly, piece by piece. The artist would paint the outline of my body, then leave, then come back the next day to paint some more. When he painted the sea water around me I took my first dive and I learned how to breach.

The artist would keep his supplies - paint, brushes, ladders, rollers - in my stomach. But then he left, and continued to paint more whales and ocean creatures around the world. In the 25 years since he painted me, I've seen thousands of people - ferry workers, dockworkers, tourists, commuters - walk across this parking lot, and pass me and my friends by. Both my fellow two-dimensional creatures on this wall with me, and our breathing and swimming counterparts in the Atlantic. And in those 25 years of sun, rain, and being exposed to the elements without being able to seek relief and shelter underwater, I've faded. And my stomach has remained without any visitors.

Until Jonah needed a place to stay. It would be cold in their car in the single digit temperature. Even by now the ferry was out of sight, out of earshot, closing in on one of the bay islands. Or perhaps already even docked for the night.

But Jonah saw my door. I had been rusted shut, but Jonah knew how to open, how to work my joints with care. They weren’t a passerby, they became a visitor. They saw me every day going and leaving work. And when they gently wrestled my door open, I gasped for breath.

They walked in, and found a couch, a flashlight, and some blankets. Something that the painter left behind many years ago, something to tide him over for the occasional late night at work. Jonah found a place to crash there, in my multi chambered stomach of an abandoned warehouse.

My counterparts in the ocean don’t have teeth, and so they swallow their food whole. But their food has to be small to pass through their baleen. They wouldn’t be able to take in a person.

But when you’re a painted whale on the side of an abandoned warehouse, sometimes you get closed shut. Not because of anything you did, but because of the chemistry that the seaside elements work on your own. I had been closed for so long, I had forgotten what was in me. I gasped for breath, took Jonah in whole, and realized that I still had it in me to care.

**Resi Ibañez** (they/them) is a Filipinx genderqueer writer, maker, and bruha based out of Lowell, MA. Their writing is primarily a way of expressing love: for their identity as it continually evolves, for their culture, for the communities they are a part of, for the places that have influenced them. In their writing, they are influenced by music, Filipino history and mythology, and by the genres of sci-fi and magical realism. They have been previously published by *bklyn boihood*, *LOAM magazine*, and *Loom Press*, and have work forthcoming in *They Rise Like a Wave: an Anthology of Asian American Women Poets* by Blue Oak Press. They are the founder of the LGBTQ+ Lowell Open Mic, and an alum of Winter Tangerine.

# BEYOND THE SEA

Nathalie De Los Santos

*November 1954.* On the tarmac, Vidal admired the silver wings of the plane, the fresh blue and red lines that were painted on the two propellers. Vidal’s mother handed their luggage to a crewman by the plane.

An attendant announced, “Philippine Airlines to New York is boarding now.”

Excitement hit him again. He was only eight and he got to travel overseas! His mother told him there’d be three stops and that this would take eleven days over the Pacific Ocean and then there was one last flight to New York. When Vidal entered the cabin, he was immediately greeted by a woman with neat golden hair tucked under her cap, wore a red scarf around her neck. Vidal blushed, holding onto his ticket tightly. She looked like the white Madonna statue in his church, the same blue eyes and fair hair. His mother chuckled and shuffled him down the aisle. As his mother buckled him in his seat, Vidal dug into the pocket in the seat in front of him. He pulled out a paper bag.

“What is this for?” Vidal asked.

His mother grinned, “It’s to throw up in.”

He understood as soon as the plane started. The turbines were loud and rocked the plane. He held onto his mother.

“When we lift off, go *aaah...*” She opened her mouth, “it’ll help when your ears pop.”

He tried his best to push down the acidic feeling rising in his throat. They served them ham on some nice blue china with silverware, which he refused. The days across the ocean were the same: a blur of nausea and overnight airport hotels in Hong Kong and South Korea, a flight attendant waking him to buckle his seatbelt. When he woke once, his mother handed him a chocolate bar in a bright red wrapper covered in English words. Soon he’d be in America. Too precious to eat, he put the chocolate into his pocket, not knowing what his own warmth would do to it.

When they landed in Seattle, Vidal didn’t take in the significance of finally being in another country. He blurted and danced, “I need to pee.”

“Down the hall, Vidal.” His father guided him.

There were two doors for the men. Vidal saw a dark-skinned man enter the door on the left. Another Black man walked past his father and said hello. His father did not answer. His father quickly checked if his satchel was zipped properly, then he quickly directed them to the bathroom

on the right. Inside were men with porcelain skin and fair hair. Vidal went to go relieve himself as his father stood by the door.

“*Chinks*,” a man muttered behind them. Vidal turned his head, curious.

The man spat at his father. His father was frozen, unable to react. As soon as Vidal tugged his father’s shirt, his father stepped back into their dimension.

“Come on,” His father pulled him away.

Outside, Vidal asked his father, “What does chink mean?”

His mother turned to them, wide-eyed.

His father explained to his mother bashfully, “I’m too scared to go into the coloured washrooms. Some Americano made fun of us in the whites.”

Though Vidal met his mother’s eyes, she was looking somewhere distant.

“Don’t get upset,” his father frowned at his mother.

“But we need to tell him...Vidal, in this country... People have a lot of differences. It matters if your skin is black or white.” Vidal looked at his own skin and then at his father’s curiously. His father’s skin was the colour of a pili nut. She caught his glances. “Our skin isn’t white, Vidal. We have to be careful.”

“Okay,” Vidal complied.

His mother opened her mouth to say something but nothing came out. After a moment, she asked “Are you hungry?”

He nodded and reached in his pocket for his chocolate bar. He grimaced when he found it lopsided and soft in his hand.

**“Our skin isn’t white, Vidal. We have to be careful.”**

When they finally made it to New York, once they made it outside of the airport, he felt something biting at his ears. Some sort of dryness that started to hurt. He covered his ears which were icy to his touch. He had never felt something like this back home. His father hailed a taxi outside the airport, and Vidal had never seen a car like that before.

“You like it, Vidal?” His father laughed as he helped him in, “They call them Packards.”

Vidal was immediately taken aback by the trees they passed, all different colours — red, yellow, some still green. He had never seen these pointed leaves before and one stuck to the window.

“That’s a maple leaf.” His mother drew around it with her finger before it flew off.

Despite the coldness in his ears, the sun was peaking out between the buildings of the city that started to bloom before him. There were a lot of buildings versus back home, the streets packed full of cars and yellow taxis. The streets were probably triple the size of back home.

When they stepped out of the car, Vidal smelled something wonderful: coffee, bacon and baked buns. His parents brought him to a cafe, which was full of colours he saw in cartoons. The seats

were padded a vibrant red and his table was turquoise with silver sides. While his parents ordered the food, he stared at the clock that had a man swinging his hips back and forth with a guitar.

The waitress came back with a plate full of scrambled eggs, sausages, a slice of cheese and a cup of chocolate milk. Back home, he would have pan del sal and eggs, maybe a hot dog.

For dinner, his mother ordered him a type of stew that she said might be closer to what they ate at home. She said it was called Hungarian goulash. It seemed like a sweeter and thicker adobo. As he ate it, he wished he had rice.

#

When Vidal was 18, he returned to New York to study economics. Vidal noticed the buildings were much taller than before, spiraling into the sky. The air smelled of garbage and sewage, so he gagged a few times passing a couple vents and mountains of garbage left out on the street. The taxis were no longer Packards and he had no word for the models they were now.

After a week, the novelty of a hamburger or steak and potatoes left him. He could not get food like his own, a Chinese restaurant down the street was the only thing that was close. He couldn’t find milk fish, but he found some shrimps by the pier. As he walked from the pier with a bag full of shrimp in one hand, a maple leaf passed him. He thought of his mom and how much better this would be with her here, just like before.

Vidal found work pushing heavy barrels full of tablet powder with a dolly in a warehouse. He earned about \$180 a month. He met most of his friends at this job. One of them was also an exchange student, a Chinese boy named Dan. His mother and father were overseas, and Vidal and him would often complain about how calling for three minutes was expensive. 3 minutes was \$30!

One day, Dan approached Vidal and told him he didn’t like his place. He wanted to be Vidal’s roommate.

“What’s wrong with where you live?” Vidal asked.

“Roommates American, can’t understand them. Don’t know them.”

And just like that, the two found themselves an apartment. Two rooms were divided by a kitchen and bathroom in the middle. Living with Dan was peaceful. Without his parents guiding him, this quiet solitude sculpted Vidal.

After Dan finished an overseas call once, he told Vidal that the phone line ran under the sea back to their homelands. Vidal and Dan had different times to call. Vidal would call the operator and wait for two hours sometimes if too many people were on the line. The operator would tell him

**After Dan finished an overseas call once, he told Vidal that the phone line ran under the sea back to their homelands.**



they'd call him back when the line was open. Dan told him he could call the day before and book a time in advance, though he'd have to be open to a window of eleven am to one am. This was fine, since his mother was always at home.

In the short three minutes, he'd try to tell her how much he liked the films *Dr. Zhivago*, *the Godfather*. Vidal wanted to be Marlon Brando in *Last Tango In Paris*, he started to mimic Marlon's brassy voice. On other weeks, he told her about the different jobs he had. Vidal couldn't always travel because he didn't have a lot of money, but if he couldn't travel, he became a man of many jobs. A salesperson. A translator. A travel agent. A volunteer in the hospital. An info desk person for a tech company.

His mother knew he was lost, but she was happy that he was safe.

*Dedicated to my father, Joe*

**Nathalie De Los Santos** is digital designer and wedding videographer based in Vancouver BC. She is one half of PilipinxPages, a digital resource about Filipino Canadian/American authors. She is speaking at the upcoming LiterAsian Festival 2020. She has written articles for *Ricepaper Magazine*, *Gastrofork* and the *Vancouver Observer*. She has read as an author at Freedom (W)rites: 8 Filipino Authors in June 2020 and at Sampaguita Perspectives: A Celebration of Filipino-Canadian Writers in 2019. She writes SFF and has completed two novels.

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# “SABI NILA”

## Christine Dizon-Manansala

“Bakit. Hinahanap ka, bakit tinatawag ang yung pangalan”  
Sabi Nila Hindi Mo Kaya  
They said you can't take it.  
I am a 30 year old womxn, I am Filipina.  
Pero sabi Nila...  
But, they said “Oh, you sound American.”  
My full name is: Christiann Joy Martinez Dizon-Manansala  
Sabi Nila- Why did you keep your Mom's name, your Dad's name  
Bakit?  
I am Filipinx, born and raised in America, represent the YYAY AREAA.

1986 Corazon Merto Martinez immigrated to the United States.  
1989 I am blessed with her as my Mama.  
I am born and raised in the US, but English is not my Native tongue.  
Grew up in an 8 plus household. Tagalog. Taglish.  
I did not learn to speak English until Our Lady of the Rosary, private catholic school in Union City.  
Blue and black pleated skirts, hair tied in 2 pig tails. Bowl cut bangs complete.

Sabi Nila – OK ka lang? Bata pa siya, mabilis siyang matutu.  
She's young, she'll learn quickly.  
They did not teach me how fast the world goes round.  
How Hellos, Good mornings, and how are yous sounded off and foreign in my mouth.  
Tagalog, with its round G's and long A's. I hated my voice and endlessly listened to Golden Books cassette tapes.  
Erasing my heritage away.  
I am Filipinx American.  
And whenever I get pissed, you hear my accent.

Trying to navigate this world and keep my culture alive.  
Sabi Nila Mawawala yung Tagalog ko,  
They said I would lose my language.  
My husband is Indian Filipino, we like to call it Indipino.  
Growing up our future children will be bi-racial.

I SAY – they will represent and know my Mama's bomb ass sinigang.

As babies they will be taught  
CLOSE OPEN, CLOSE OPEN – Beautiful Eyes.

Sabi KO – They will know bahay kubo.  
Hot wax spilled during the candle dance, and the pain it feels to have your ankle smashed during Tinikling practice.

They will know how to take their elder’s hand, place it to their forehead, and MANO.  
Because – Sabi Nila Malilimutan mu rin yan.  
They said I would forget as I grew older.  
But this, this is ingrained.  
Roots are planted deep.  
And just like the episodes of Maalaala Mo Kaya,  
These letters will not be erased or forgotten.

No matter what is taken away.  
Kahit ano ang sasabihin nila.  
No matter WHAT they say.  
Ito, hindi ko malilimutan.  
This, I will not forget.

**Christine Dizon-Manansala** (she/her) is a Poet, Avid Reader, and Small Business Jewelry Maker. She has been creating poems and short stories since childhood. She takes pride in her Filipino-American Heritage and can often be found demolishing a bowl of Sinigang. (With Fish Sauce, of course).

If ever in need of funky and beautiful charms and jewelry pieces, her Etsy shop **HellaweenAndTingz** is a must-see platform.

She is looking forward to publishing her poetry and sharing her vulnerabilities and revelations with the world.

**B\*Y\*N\***  
**Joseph Schwarzkopf Jr./Butchoy**

*Following the poetic form, The Labra, created by Keana Aguila Labra.*

My mother tells me of half recalled grandparents  
With possibility of tainted blood, of self destruction  
Of women who hid with their sisters from the lust of invaders  
Of men with mestizo features and possibility

She doesn’t want to age  
My mother tells me of half recalled grandparents  
Ones she barely met and ones she carried with her  
With possibility of tainted blood, of self destruction

Of women who hid with their sisters from the lust of invaders  
Shaking between unsolid structures, clutching hands  
Of men with mestizo features and possibility  
Wasted for the white man’s salvation

We do not, we can not speak in other stories  
We only reminisce on the faint shadows of ancestors.

**Joseph Schwarzkopf Jr./Butchoy** (he/him) is a Western Sydney-based poet and filmmaker. His practice explores the varied experiences of the Filipino diaspora. His written works have been published in the *UTS Writers’ Anthology*, the *Australian Poetry Anthology*, and the *Mascara Literary Journal*. Joseph’s favourite word is pie.

MAHAL

GUGMA

# Sweet Manong, Sweet Fish

Jason Magabo Perez

Here, inside of this sentence stretching toward

the Pacific, set deep, still on Kumeyaay land,

here, in the thick historical present, out front

of a foreclosed single family home, past a

dried-dead yellow lawn, past plastic-covered

furniture of the evicted, out front of a one-

bedroom apartment, each wall lined with

bunkbeds for migrants since long ago, here,

out front of another out-of-business Filipino

restaurant, here, along a sidewalk of abandoned

shoestrings, receipts, and grocery lists, here,

on the corner of Black Mountain and Mira Mesa,

the smell of beef broth and basil and gasoline

and turmeric and cilantro and fresh asphalt and

deep-fried rice paper, here, waiting at the bus

stop with students, tech workers, lolas y abuelitas

in straw sunhats and visors, their reused plastic

Target bags sagging with bleached white socks

and the salvaged of yesterday's chichiria, here,

where many un-English languages are familiar

music, familiar longing, familiar refusal, a tin

and garlic glottal syllable every now and again,

here, now at this very bus stop, amidst the screech

of brakes and the hum of traffic, here, in all



of these clauses, lives, so quietly, so humbly,  
  
at the helm of divine laughter, this unremark-  
  
able man, his brownness an archipelago of  
  
eczema and radiation pink, his nailbeds tinted

chemical green, his oversized blue and orange  
  
Pendleton full of single threads running and  
  
running, his unevenly hemmed groundskeeper  
  
khakis consistently starched, his Florsheim

loafers freshly polished, Solvang cap still  
  
stiff on his head, still stained with coffee  
  
and brandy, his same spectacles bent, resting  
  
crooked and uneasy, here: a labor of a man,

who at the end of this sentence, this mourning,  
  
this story, shall be remembered simply as pare,  
  
amigo, kasama, compa, lolo, asawa, tatay, tito,  
  
tío, uncle, manong, abalayan, stranger, ninong,

labor, that widower who could never petition  
  
his familia, that sometimes lettuce-picker,  
  
sometimes strawberry-picker, laid-off bellhop,  
  
laid-off postal worker, freelance maintenance

worker, freelance custodian, retired grounds-  
  
keeper, comrade who plays chess and waxes  
  
geographic with fellow elders at the sacred  
  
Starbucks on Camino Ruiz, that 82-year-old

who when diagnosed with walking pneumonia

again and again this whole past year eventually

for one last time stops by Seafood City to scarf

down the saltiest of dilis, who drinks a six-pack

of Red Horse and cries through his throat, who

boards the bus, and sings for the dead at every

streetlight altar along the boulevard, who travels

down the 805, to La Jolla Village Drive, where

he once went on strike at the Marriott, where

he once at a hotel bar fantasized about rushing

a white man for calling him stupid and dirty,

down to the VA hospital, here, now, he smokes

a handful of Reds, and hikes down the hill, passes

archways, condos, and mansions where wealthy

white people live, where university chancellors

hoard bones of indigenous people, down to

La Jolla shores, across grass, into sand, past

college kids drinking cheap vodka in water bottles,

past weakly lit bonfires, that lakay who at this

moment remembers then forgets who he is, what

is ghost, what is bone, what is subject, he is

migrating again, this old man who for this one

last time shall remember then forget his name,

his song, lyrics aflame and escaping through

cracks in his lungs, this lolo who disrobes himself

one final time of that pressed Pendleton and those

starched khakis, this lolo who, here, now is walking

and whistling along the shore, still in white briefs,

white socks, Solvang cap, and bent spectacles, this

lakay, whose skin is quickly becoming all scales,

who is walking and whistling into the waves further

and further until he needs to tread, then swim, and

now he is swimming and swimming, and his arms

become fins, his legs twist into a thick tail, his

walking pneumonia no longer, canals of water in

his lungs no longer, no longer cracks in his breath,

or his throat, or his lungs, or his song, his body now

gills all over, now there, all the way over there,

beyond this, beyond this sentence, is that lakay, his

body now bursting and bursting so full of the Pacific.

**Jason Magabo Perez** (he/him) is the author of *Phenomenology of Superhero* (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2016) and *This is for the mostless* (WordTech Editions, 2017). Perez’s prose and poetry have also appeared in *Witness*, *TAYO*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Entropy*, *The Feminist Wire*, *The Operating System*, and *Faultline*. Previous Artist-in-Residence at Center for Art and Thought, Perez currently serves as Community Arts Fellow at Bulosan Center for Filipinx Studies and Associate Editor for *Ethnic Studies Review*. Perez is an Assistant Professor of Ethnic Studies at California State University San Marcos.

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