

HOME COMING

hanachurisato

cherry blossoms swirl over and over
in streaks of pink around the little
girl, thirteen, too old to chew lollipops
but too young to really understand love
standing in the street in Queens, NY,
next to a temple. then it happened
the domination of a strange man, of
course, but also the yearn in her body
that spirals into some autonomy –
the blood that stains her under-things.
without the man afterwards, she will go
back to her house, blossoms in half-bloom
marking her blouse, her hair, and up
to her room, she will await the myth
of the hero, or the fatherly prince, or
the wandering fool. she waits until fall,
so the buds that have opened will close.

Picket Fence

You are good at withholding pleasure
so that it exudes bit by bit from your ligaments
from your back on which you imprinted your secrets.

I was good at making them look, and not just at the body,
but at the glint of the edges of the plates in the sink
after they've been soaped and scrubbed clean.

Look at you walking down Magsaysay Street, telling him
what to buy. You know when and how to purl
to get the right purse, down to the pink label.

Don't let anyone tell *you* that you should be buttoned down,
in a house, giving orders and playing with the cats, unless
you don't want that, though isn't it what you want?

I too have dreams of white bodies and white picket fences
where there is a swinging gateway opened for you and me.

Float

Childhoods are messy things.
8 years old, I was the main attraction
on the best float in the fiesta.

I wore an orange dress, stood
in the center of a wooden frame
carried by four boys or men.

My mother let me
wear her red lipstick that day,
but it kept smearing in my teeth.

In college, I learned a trick:
place your lips 'round your thumb, as if
you're suckling, then slowly pull it out,
leaving a salty aftertaste
in your mouth.

Goodbyes are like that, too –
blurred memory of the naked lightbulbs
on the tops of floats in the barrio,
my last and lasting memory
zooming out of Zambales.

The Dance

The punch is spiked, as always
the bitterness of alcohol is evident

even when the sweetness of the sugars
circle in my tongue, like in your kiss

under the bleachers afterschool
before you and your team come home

before the victory, before the party,
we were just a couple of teen immigrants

exchanging whispers in the bleachers
about social studies and your crew

and having to cut your long hair and
the way your mother can't pronounce

Worcestershire sauce and that moment
you realized you loved me, when I raised

my hand in social studies. Here,
in the dance, after your Hispanic ass

has won the football game for the first time,
girls squeamish around you, you take

your hand in mine and raise,
our hands, you're home.

Cerebral

1.

There is nothing so surprising as a blank page,
delving like a bird into repeated patterns of speech
daily utterances, tinkering with the music deep within
as the winged animal does to a body of water, a gulp
of drink that flows into the system not yet the chosen
word, but the automatic maneuver of the mind, an act
of survival.

The mind is surprising in all it lets go and all it keeps within
as on a whim, the bird goes to from perch to perch, an act
of listening to its surroundings, from each chosen
movement to beginnings of footsteps churning into speech
each memory the undulations of what is to be, like a gulp
of fresh air from above the ground, from above the page,
where the writer writes, his act of survival.

2.

What is this, this life of no completion? The width of a pillar
is the circumference of a circle, in the measurements a strictness
much like my father's voice, where I am in the bathroom by the tiles
crying out into the abyss from the limelight of the light-bulb, myself
at the beginning and at the end, from the frontlines circling back
to the place where I started to lose what I meant.

So when I told you I loved the music of a line, I meant
how a house is kept from disarray by the strictness
of a door, from disrepair by the boundaries of pillars,
from ruin by the cement flooring underneath the tiles.
And you smiled thinking of how many times I led myself
to the brink and still came circling back.

History

And afterwards, they said my name.
Repeated it over again, historicizing it
in their oral narrative that spread
like feathers through the afternoon winds.

Is this infamy, this inglorious account
of the wrongs you have done,
of the people you wronged,
including yourself...is it fame?

First the feeling, then the event, then the inference,
then the stretching of the truth in increments.

Tongues are master storytellers,
sewing the threads in the fabric of the loom.

My words speak from my own soprano
an aria of the blurring of grey to grey
in the brown landscape of the autumn of desire.

The myth ruins the lady. Ruins the standing man.
Like a classical pillar becomes suddenly
a frail stone, like that, ruined.

What is not talked about is whispered,
What is not whispered about is written,
What is not written about causes a woman to go mad.

Lola

In warmth like this, I long to close my eyes,
listen to her timbre like a sunrise
vigorous recounting of long-gone days,
a lecture on her lips of the old ways,
as the smoke from her cigarette drifts off,
melding with the breeze sliding past the loft,
a kiss on the underside of our legs the way
the river slides through the grass in the bay –
circling round and round mirroring the time,
day by day until it finally climbs
to that crescendo our body begs to call
the peaceful, slow drifting chime of our soul...
Lola, let us dance cheek to cheek like this.
Get up, let go your scrambled brain amiss,
floating your memories all daylight long,
lifted and lassoed by each tender song.

Visitor

Facing a blank page once again
the mind is like a computer, searching
for files that can fill the soul

The sweet summer rain cools
the knots in the confused head
like the deer in the woods.

Talk to me, tender heart that gives
more than it receives, that shelters
more than it seeks solace.

Out the window, we
watch the landscape
as we drive in your car.

You were mystified by the swinging monkeys
of Subic Bay, by the whirling waves,
by my smile. I was the swirling
mermaid by the river, you were
asking what a metaphor was. I answered,
what a wave is to the shoreline.

Bansa

Watching the lights in this one block they call Magsaysay St.
go down, the body freezes caught between the shadows
of the cavernous mouth of the sunrise, reminiscing
the chill breeze of Queens, New York.

Mahal. So many ways to say nothing and everything at once
for those city lights and that skyline we so admired
where my father, coming off from the navy ships,
chose to land his boots.

And now I wonder if I am seeing more than just reflection
in the windows of those buildings, but the lives inside –
remembering childhood vacations: atop a mango tree,
hands sticky from sap.

In a sea full of rocks

fish woman resides
and the rocks
disassembles her tail
around-about where
she never wanted legs,
as the idea had not
occurred to her.

Who
needs legs when you
can have fins,
she has often thought
though the hooks
slices her into nicks.

When she's on sand,
she lifts the cover
up to her knees,
her human body
desire, burning wax.
She feels tacked on,
one colliding
with the other.

Her fish body longs
to strip scales, now,
now that she has seen
the boat.

Vacating

*Tell us where to go next. Not
the cleanness of the ending
but blending oranges in with the milk
so that beginning no longer resembles the end,
but some semblance of a middle way:
you biting your straw and slurping
here, with me, and then gone, away
or left behind, rather, in memory
as it travels through the circuits of the body.
The smell of rubber soles in the sun.
That barbecued taste of your mouth.
The island nearing our open boat.
There is a crescendo you can almost feel
this far from the shore, like a song.
Then erased, gone, hopping back,
lost in the middle of the long summer,
and no one to help. I'm tired of the sun
rising. *Go back to where you belong,*
as if belonging was a place, not this
waiting to be finalized in your eyes.*