

MAGIC IS

And 9 More Magical Poems

This is for Peter.

MAGIC

- I. Magic Is
- II. My Daddy Is A Dragon
- III. I Have A Little Secret
- IV. *Duende*
- V. I Found Two Friends In An *Ukay-Ukay*
- VI. Little Verse
- VII. If You Only Knew
- VIII. Lola Is A Strange One
- IX. My Monster Tanagas
- X. Dreams Of An Old Dog

Magic Is

Magic is the playground. The *perya* of the gods.

The Toink

Toink

Toink

Of the pinball that beats all odds;

It's the eye that though covered, can spy the sky,

And knows when the fireflies go quietly by.

It's the luck of sweet summer, and the height of kites,

The whole world year-round in Christmas lights

The unlikely find of a coin that could buy

Bazooka and siomai and unlimited Sprite.

Magic is all that is untrue,

To everyone but You.

Throw open its gates with a song

Abandon the press and the throng

Summon your dead King Kong,

And let it take you.

Let it take You.

* * *

My Daddy Is A Dragon

My daddy is a dragon.
He is tall, like the sky.
On his mighty, mighty shoulders I
Can sit as though I fly.
I'm not with him as often,
He lives away from me
But when I shut my eyes I see
How he wants my world to be.

He wants stars -
The biggest - in all my nights
That I be undaunted by the darkest heights
And that I might have the brightest lights
To guide my flight alone.
He wants waters,
Winds, and sycamore towers
That my steps be scented by the gentlest flowers
And my tears, each one, be washed by the showers
Of his dreams.

My daddy is a dragon.
Fearsome, like the storm.
He quiets men,
Near cinders them
But me, he cradles warm.
Though he's not around so often -

He's free and flown away -

I like the thought

That when I say

His burning jaws do stay.

My daddy is a dragon.

Magic through and through

They say he loves his treasure

And that

I know

is true.

* * *

I Have A Little Secret

I have a little secret

(no, it's actually quite BIG).

A mastodon's been trailing me
steady as a brig.

I don't know where it came from.

It just appeared one night.

I tried to say, "Shoo, go away!"

But it cried a sorry sight.

When I go to school it follows.

It makes a din at Math,

I try to hush it up but still

I get Ms. Castro's wrath.

Some days my homework's missing

I try to tell my pop:

Can't save a piece of paper that

Has a mastodon on top.

At lunch it sniffs my lunchbox

(I LOVE my broccoli)

But 'less I give it all my greens

It never lets me be!

My *ate* she complains that
I never shut the door.
I wish she'd see the evidence
Of hairballs on the floor.

My ma she thinks I sleep too late
But how's a kid to rest
When there's a giant mastodon
Acting like a pest?

So you see I'm scolded often:
"There's no mastodon, there's none!
This crazy beast, you make it up
Just so you have your fun."

I'm in a pickle; I can't tell them
What they want just can't be done
The mastodon has said it stays
Till I'm a healthy ninety-one.

* * *

Duende

We'd play underneath the flame tree.

Wag diyán, Amparo would say.

There are things in the dark,

In the earth-deep dark

Of a kind I would not betray.

Do not wake them with your clamor.

Do not draw them from their mounds.

They bide to claim companions

To take beneath the ground.

Do not look them in their faces.

Do not heed their wicked prayers.

If you touch their trees in moonlight,

Your soul, my child, is theirs.

But Amparo was toothless, and we were young -

(A whopping six and eight!) -

We'd pull at her skirts, dig our toes in the dirt,

And dance in the gardens till late.

Then, one night, the moon hung low.

We sat on the deep-dark earth,

The canopy red, the leaves like a bed

Of blood on the dark-deep earth.

Halik-a.

Came a rustling. 'Twas barely a whisper.
The night cast shadows in miles.
Our gazes, compelled, to the trunk of the tree,
Froze dead as some *thing*, at us, smiled.

Halik-a, it said softly, its fingers, reaching.
To the house! To the house! I cried.
But Sammy had gone, a-float in a haze.
He'd kissed the red tree on its side.

The next morn we rose and Sammy had fevered.
His eyes were misted with milk.
His cheeks were ice-cold and white as snow,
But his lips were scarlet as silk.

Pneumonia, pneumonia! Nanay lamented.
Amparo shook her head.
The word rose slick upon her tongue.
Duende. Duende, she said.

The days, like leaves, shed, wasted.
My brother withered in bed.
His breath smelled so like the deep-dark earth,

It filled the house with dread.

Nanay phoned the Carmelites,

The Franciscans, the Dominicans, too.

But their incense and books and beads were naught

And none knew what to do.

Then, one night, the moon hung low.

I sat upright, unsleeping.

A thought had come. I clutched it close,

My heart, a war drum, beating.

So late the hour, the air dead-cold,

The grass a blackened sea

Blood red leaves crunched underfoot

As I kissed the flaming tree.

The day was bright when Sammy woke.

Senora, she wept for joy.

Amparo, my brother? Sammy spoke.

But none ever found the boy.

* * *

I Found Two Friends In An *Ukay-Ukay*

I found two friends in an *ukay-ukay*.

They were mine (I knew!) They were mine! They were mine!

From the crease on their cheeks, to the chips on the blue,

Gosh, were they fine, and I could tell they were mine!

I clutched them close on the screaming highway.

I held steady their souls at every leap of the jeep.

I wiped them down from Sunday to Sunday,

And counted their pores in the weight of my sleep.

These friends, they're twins. I was their third.

We three we went places where no one could go.

One day I told them of the Alps, and lo -

Through the smog of Quiapo there fell snow.

On Sundays, like wind, we'd follow the Pasig

Brown breath, the water, thick churning ahead.

How we could have turned around at the bend,

But every time said, "To Binondo!" instead.

Then, as with most, the change was sudden.

Unbidden, it came, stealing in with the night.

My father's bonus brought home a sight -

Boxes, and bags, and sweet sneakers in white!

The following morning, I hurried to rise,
Threw on my clothes, and a grin besides,
Tripped over my friends to get outside,
And whistled away, new sneaks in stride.

* * *

Little Verse

Sitting in a humble patch of light
with some breeze in it, to write,
or read, or draw, has got to be
one of the greatest charms of life.

* * *

If You Only Knew

I am not a kid.

I am a unicorn.

I have stupendous, dynamic powers.

I can speak to all the flowers.

When no one's looking I can fly.

I'm hiding from the bad guys.

That's why I'm inside this body.

I know you don't believe me,

But you should try.

I could turn you into a mushroom!

I could turn you into a flea!

I could zap you into a mushroom!

...

This mole is where my horn used to be.

* * *

Lola Is A Strange One

Lola is a strange one. She isn't old at all.

Well, she's hunch-backed and she's bony but,

She shops in Mega Mall.

She wears frilly silver jackets, purple Chucks, and jeggings, too.

She styles her hair like Einstein in a 1960s 'do.

She plays Bingo! with her friends at night, clutching Lolo's war beret.

She moonwalks when she wins and says,

It drives the years away.

She's savvy on the Internet. She has a Facebook page.

With all her "Likes," "Unlikes" and tags, you'd never guess her age.

Lola is a strange one. Where she goes the people stare.

Where she goes the grown-ups whisper names I'd never dare.

It frightens Mom, and saddens Dad,

But *I* think she is rare -

Queerness is a special thing, and there is magic there!

In fact when I am very old, I hope I'm just as strange

Let the boring, "normal" folk think I'm a tad deranged.

I'd be dancing in my purple Chucks,

Moonwalking till I go.

And just like Lola, I'd be glad

I'd celebrated so.

* * *

My Monster Tanagas

My Monster Tanaga 01: Kruger

A somber, staring three-eyed thing
All the day sits unblinking
The secret no one knows -
At four he licks the windows.

My Monster Tanaga 02: Otot

Sneaks my crayons, hides them right
Chews them all except the Whites.
When he's had enough, you'll know -
Through clouds of smelly rainbows.

My Monster Tanaga 03: Evil Bunny

Soft, un-sweet vampire bunny
Thinks scaring cats is funny
Makes her nest inside my shoes
And when happy, poos and poos.

My Monster Tanaga 04: Mr. Ivo Black

Black horror, all teeth and hair

Despicable, awful scare.

Sleeps inside my room at night

Pulsing gently like a light.

Monster Tanaga 05: Bat-Bat

Hangs from the bathroom ceiling

Michelangelo, molting

Says toothpaste is a medium

Paints toes to fight the tedium.

* * *

Dreams of an Old Dog

These quiet days remind me so
Of golden summers long ago.
All old dogs will let you know
It's back to then they ache to go.

Then - when their world was young
And their limbs, titan-strong
And their lips, unlocked with song
In a time when naught went wrong.

How, then, they scaled the devil trees,
Bloodied bad their sturdy knees,
Launched paper ships in sidewalk seas
Slayed their *askals'* monster fleas
And took *siesta* in the sunshine.

How they slurped their *Sarsi* cold
While the rains fell down in folds
And in the thunder rolled and rolled
Shrugging off what they'd been told
For the pretty girls stood watching.

And how, despite their naked feet,
Flurry-fisted fights and feats,
Their hearts, they claimed, were *santan*-sweet

For they oft brought back their mothers treats –
Sampalok, kamias, and chico.

These quiet days remind me so
Of sticky summers well outgrown
And like all dogs who've grayed and slowed
My tired limbs just ache to go
Back to where the sky is gold
And weightless like the days of old.

* * *