

## **Paper Planes**

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## Paper Planes

I do not know what Death looks like,  
but I hope she looks like my teacher.

    She wears striped socks,  
    and keeps a box  
of scraps of paper with her.

She teaches me to fold them  
into planes, and boats, and birds.

    They float and fly,  
    she says, all by  
The spirit of our words.

I think of my lolo's coffee  
And the rings they made on his chair.

    The paper pressed  
    on his napping chest.  
The summer breeze in his hair.

I asked him once what Death looked like  
and he told me, "Like a friend.

    Someone to make  
    all the planes to take  
you up, up til the end."

Until the time I see him again  
my teacher and I will try our best  
    to make planes and boats  
    to carry notes  
for him to read while he rests.

## **Turugin, the Sleep Fairy**

*Turugin, Turugin. The moon is climbing high.  
The dream dust gathers swiftly in the corners of my eye.*

Have you heard of tiny Turugin  
and her little small guitar?  
She climbs your sleepy forehead  
and sings about the stars.

Turugin crosses your little brow,  
and rests her boots on your lids.  
Heavier they get, til they close  
as she burrows down and sits.

Her dusty boots leave little trails  
on your cheeks when you wake with the sun.  
Her sweet soft lullaby rings true  
in the morning when she's gone.

We never know where Turugin hides  
Or where she goes in the day  
But we know at night, she visits us  
to sing the dark away.

*Turugin, Turugin. The moon is dipping low.  
We know you leave to be where all our missed things go.*

## Orchids

My lola was a ballerina  
when she was younger.  
Her small feet were knobby  
and rough, manicured toes  
like fresh pink tips on twisty  
flowers. Her arms folded  
and stretched in slow curves.  
Her chin, always lifted up,  
even when she began to stoop  
and curl. When her petals  
faded, she glowed even  
brighter.

My lolo used to say  
that you could take the girl  
out of the dance but never  
the dance out of the girl.  
To see them swaying together  
was another thing.  
Like leaves in the wind.

When lola left us,  
I thought lolo would  
never dance again. He planted  
her favorite flower in his garden.  
Orchids. They leaned down from  
the branches of the mango tree,  
reaching to me in slow curves,  
brushing the top of my head.  
They looked up at the sun,  
no matter which way they bent.  
My lolo tends to them, moving  
with the swinging trees  
and bouncing blooms.  
Bright little hearts swaying.  
Like leaves in the wind.

## Catching Rain

Takatak-taktak. Takatak-taktak.  
Takatak-taktak. Takatak-taktak.

The rain is sweet  
in our old street  
I tasted it while we played  
by the duhat trees  
and the mango leaves  
we danced around in the shade.

We caught each drop  
and drank them up,  
our freshest little potion.  
We ran and hopped  
and did not stop  
until we had to go in.

Takatak-taktak. Takatak-taktak.  
Takatak-taktak. Takatak-taktak.

The air is thick  
and the clouds are sick  
in our new home in the city.  
The stars are quick  
and the rain won't stick  
and the streets are always busy.

But I still dance  
when I have the chance  
and the sidewalks are lit and clear.  
If you have no plans,  
you can take my hand  
it will be sweeter with you here.

Takatak-taktak. Takatak-taktak.  
Takatak-taktak. Takatak-taktak.

## Wrap

My mother wears her grief around her shoulders.  
It wraps around her, a gathering cloud.  
It puffs at her sleeves, trails behind her like rain.  
The lightest, but densest of shrouds.

It drapes over her knees, swishes at her ankles.  
She buckles it tight around her waist.  
She slips them on her wrists, her fingers and toes,  
makes sure they're tightly laced.

She paints her face with it: Eyebrows, lips, cheeks.  
The tip of every finger nail.  
It has every color that she and I love  
but it feels like they're covered by a veil.

She wears it all with a quiet pride,  
but I see her walk is slow.  
Her arms are heavy and her heels drag the floor  
and her chin and eyes dip low.

Sometimes, when she lets me, I take some  
and tie it in my hair or round my shoe.  
I put them on my ears and cup them in my hands,  
to share the weight with her too.

My mother wears her grief around her shoulders.  
It is heavy, but she wears it with grace.  
At night, I wrap my arms tight around her  
and dress her in the warmest embrace.

## **If Peter Were to Visit Me**

If Peter Pan were to visit me,  
he would have to jump the mango tree.  
The sap would stick, and he'd scrape his knee.  
    And he'd crow like a fighting rooster.

His shadow would snag in the garden wall.  
Trying to free himself, he'd fall.  
And through the santan bushes he'd crawl  
    and he'd crow like a fighting rooster.

He would use a bar of Tide to stick  
the shadow to his heel but it  
would slip in the dark, now clean, too slick.  
    And he'd crow like a fighting rooster.

The bars on my window would prove a chore,  
and the screen behind those, a little more.  
And then katol under, burning on the floor--  
    he'd crow like a fighting rooster.

My mother would greet him, slipper in hand.  
She sleeps lightly and will hear his feet land  
and smack his head before he can stand.  
    And he'd crow like a fighting rooster.

But if Peter Pan were to dodge her too,  
and fly by my bed and try to woo  
me, I would think of all the tales I knew...  
    And scream like a fighting rooster.

For in my city when the moon is bright,  
the shadowless creatures that crawl at night  
are things to fear, and things to fight  
and not invite inside.

So, if Peter visited the Philippines,  
and never minded the bars and screens,  
he'd have to deal with the other beings  
    whose crows sound nothing like a rooster.

## **Breakfast**

I'll have ketchup with my breakfast eggs, please.  
And my eggs, I'll have them fried.  
My pan de sal toasted, with melty cheese.  
Some pineapple juice on the side.

Can I ask for today's newspaper too?  
With the komiks in a separate heap?  
A pillow for my back will do.  
And a small little stool for my feet.

I confess I prefer my eggs scrambled and plain,  
I like peanut butter with my bread.  
Pineapple juice makes my tummy complain,  
and the komiks are all I've ever read.

I have never really had breakfast this way,  
the stool and pillow are not my style.  
But lolo ate breakfast like this everyday,  
and it's like he is here for a while.



## October

six o'clock in the evening.  
the winds blow the little flames  
dancing over dripping candles.  
my family gets ready to pray.  
mama sits on my right,  
michaela on my left.  
she is not my sister but she is,  
to me. her mama sits behind her,  
tita ann. she is mama's sister.  
their siblings surround her,  
tita donna and tito juan.  
there are two empty chairs  
for lolo and lola. i see them  
in my mind: lolo holding  
lola's fingers like they  
are a decade of Hail Mary's,  
counting them softly, laughing  
as she scolds him. he presses  
her rosary fingers to his lips.  
michaela leads the prayer  
because it is her turn.  
her voice is sweet and small  
like the white sampaguita on the altar.  
as the prayer rolls away from her lips,  
the rest of us answer her.  
when no one is watching  
i lean down and kiss my rosary too,  
and imagine it is lola's hand.

## Somewhere

Have you heard of Memory  
sitting in her chair?  
She tells a pretty story bout  
a place she calls Somewhere.

She'll string a band of broken stars  
and braid them in her hair.  
Broken stars and broken hearts  
found in this Somewhere.

I tell her all my secrets,  
every wish and every prayer.  
She wears them like small trinkets  
to bring with her Somewhere.

I know you're on the other end  
I know I'll see you there.  
I know we will be best of friends  
sometime soon Somewhere.

And when the night slips by my door  
I'll sleep without a care.  
I know somehow someone adores  
and waits for me Somewhere.

## One Thing

Yesterday, I closed  
my eyes and remembered  
when you were One Thing.

One Thing that hugged  
me in the morning,  
and kissed me at night.

I remembered when  
you were One Thing  
that danced to the radio

and sat in the garden.  
When you were One Thing  
with a name I called

when I fell and scraped  
a knee or found a pretty rock.  
One Thing that sipped coffee and

made paper planes and  
promises and sang and  
cried and lost Other Things.

But then I remember  
you are now... Many Things.  
The sun through my window,

the flowers in the garden.  
Ketchup on eggs, and  
the rain drops I catch.

Newspapers and necklaces,  
wishes. You are the poems  
and stories, the mornings and

the nights. Every hug and every kiss,  
every prayer. I cannot pretend that  
I don't miss when you were

One Thing I could hold.  
But I am glad that you are still  
Many Things I can feel.