

Gatus, Jelicka Mari M
14 June 2018

A 14 Hour Plane Ride Away: A Series of Poems

Introduction

Pilipinas kong mahal (*Philippines, my love*)
 Pasensiya ka na at ngayon lang umiral (*I apologize that it is only now I realize*)
 Sa puso ko ang importansiya nang pagkapit sa (*In my heart, how important it is to grasp*)
 Pagiging Filipino (*my Filipino identity.*)
 Ako'y takot tanggapin ang katotohanan na (*I'm terrified to accept the reality of knowing*)
 Huli na ang lahat para yakapin mo parin ako sa iyong silangan (*it's too late to be embraced by your setting sun*)
 Bayan kong mahal (*The country that I love,*)
 Ang layo layo ko na. (*I am so far away from you*)
 Kunin mo na ako ulit. (*Please take me back.*)

A never ending journey told in six parts.

The Lovers

I don't know much about them
 Only that people tell me I look exactly like my dad
 And that my mom and I can be mistaken for sisters
 Yet I don't feel any sort of familial connection,
 I just smile and nod my head in appreciation.
 I wish I did, then maybe I can begin to understand
 How they endured fourteen years of separation
 With a plan laid out on their hands that this would be the best
 For the rest of our lives — that the reality of losing time being husband and wife
 Won't implicate frustration, I wouldn't know.
 It's a trauma only the two of them can show
 To one another behind closed doors — I wonder
 Within the four years we've finally bonded together, here,
 Do they feel content?

The Mother

I chose to sit by the window so I can look at the clouds getting closer to my vision
 Not a very good decision when for the most part of this fourteen hour plane ride
 I tilted my head to the side away from the vast realization that I am leaving
 Home.
 My mother rarely uttered a word throughout the night, but her eyes were enough
 To tell me this is real, keep your emotions tight to yourself or else everyone in this
 Plane would think I reprimanded you for something so petty and cruel.
 But, mother, you did. Have you forewarned me of this drastic rewriting of my life
 Would I bother taking not just a peek of the outside, anticipating new skylines and

Different signs getting off of this novel ride above the Pacific oceanside?
 I would be watching the passionate orange of the horizon diffusing into the night sky without a blink
 Instead I shrink to my seat — I cannot help the tears burning my cheeks
 You've known of us moving countries for more than a few weeks, that explains months of errands outside of the house
 And my allowances being renounced until further notice from you
 I never complained, you always knew best
 But at that moment when you only looked at me without the invitation of an embrace
 I've always wondered how much you wanted me to forget about my birthplace.

The Foreigner

It didn't feel like I was for a good while, seeing relatives I've only met at reunions blurred out in my head
 Comfort washed over my senses that this could be my new home
 But the incoming dread entered my fourteen year old vessel instead — my aunts, uncles and cousins
 Can only do so much talking, why did it feel foreign to be with people from the same blood
 And not sound the same? My English wasn't lacking, but my confidence was
 The elephant in the room started making noise
 Once the girls and the boys of my high school noticed my naivety
 To frivolous things like dating and insensitivity to my foreignness in this country
 They didn't stop staring.

The Model Minority

Four papers, three of the same kind, two different high schools, one pair of proud parents
 The essence of secondary education is to maintain physical copies of your accomplishments
 Or the migration would be for naught — receiving what I presumed to be deserving compliments
 To what I thought I worked hard on did not sit very well in my stomach
 Not when cheery shouts of “Congratulations!” were mostly followed by hushed whispers of allegations
 That it is rooted in me to be this way — sacrificing sleepless nights and hydration for my sorry tired eyes
 They believe I don't sweat blood for this — they believe my parents didn't see each other for years for this
 The paradox of misfortune prevails itself in the culminated recognition I was handed in four years
 Student of the Month, Student of the Month, Student of the Month, Distinguished Scholar
 Turn to the front, don't squint your eyes even more in the light, tell them your plan of being a lawyer or a doctor — what is it, really?
 You put me on a pedestal, you make me feel incredible with your true intentions actually terrible
 With your discreet way of saying I will never be American.

The Migrant

But this is where my mother's silence made much more sense
 Hence the decision of raising me in the motherland, she gave me the opportunity to establish
 My position as a person whose past shouldn't necessarily define you

But allow for a breakthrough of someone who can handle the challenges life decides to throw at us

Being unprepared and overwhelmed, my heart did sustain some damages being apart from friends I've considered family — of a prospective college I had dreams of applying for
The journey has taken me elsewhere, and I confess that sometimes it still seems like a phenomenon that I cannot bear to swallow with acceptance
However, the migrant is known for its forward momentum, so what else is there to do
Than explore the spectrum of people, ideas, goals I now envision right before my eyes
These walls of continuous regret will become my demise, someday — so I should go,
The light promising unknown joy I shall turn to,
“Do not fear motion, it will transform you.”

The Daughter

That is me, or someone I am striving to be
She holds a pen in her hand, a powerful tool not wise for a fool
To shorthand — history shouldn't be summarized as every aspect of what happened before
Led to situations that caused an uproar
In my heart, now it cannot be contained in its chambers of the past
Forward I move, the only way to soothe this desperate soul of its questions of why I am here
And why I shouldn't fear being Filipino in a place that gives me risk of having this identity
stripped away from me — not anymore, who says I can't be both tied to the land I was born in
And create a new relationship in this country with my chin
Up high — the notion of discovering myself outweigh consequences of departing from
Home.
But home can be myself,
Soon enough.

Conclusion

Pilipinas kong mahal (*Philippines, my love*)
Pasensiya ka na at ngayon lang natagpuan (*I apologize that it is only now that I realize*)
Ang importansiya nang pagmamahal sa sarili kong bansa (*The importance of loving my own country*)
Nang lumisan ang aking pamilya patungo rito sa Amerika (*When my family and I left for America*)
Pero wag kang mag-alala, hindi ako susuko (*But don't worry, I won't give up*)
Sa pagpatuloy na pag usbong ng aking pagkatao (*In keeping my identity in tact*)
Bilang isang Filipino (*As a Filipino*)
Malayo man ako sa'yo (*I may be far away from you*)
Dala dala kita sa araw araw na pagpatunay ko (*I hold you close in every day that I prove*)
Sa bansang 'to na kaya ko. (*to this country that I can be me*)
Kayang kaya ko. (*I definitely can do this.*)

Explanation

For this final project, I decided to make a series of poems which I turned into a spoken word project as well. I do not have adequate enough skills to create a well made video nor transform my idea into a masterpiece of watercolor and brushstrokes, but I do like to write — a lot, and this final project has given me the opportunity to actually write something about myself,

something that is near and dear to my heart. I chose to utilize six of the tarot cards to complete my project as I tried to find the ones that deemed fit for my personal experience being Asian American as well as relating such to the course themes throughout the quarter.

Firstly, The Lover represents the beginning of my history, if you will, with a brief introduction of my relationship with my parents. In a way, this connects to Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* as majority of her book was spent explaining her connection with her parents and their lives before moving to America. I think it was important to establish the whole scene of my project with the mention of my parents because they are primarily the reason why I am living in the United States in the first place. The second card would be The Mother where I recounted the 14 hour flight my mom and I were on to finally move to the United States from the Philippines. I tried to paint the scene as accurate as I can from my memories and the emotions I had during the flight. In addition, this part of the poem implies that my mother had already known about our migration way before I was given any notice which relates to the tarot card itself that depicts "The Mother" who self-sacrifices herself as well as the "key to one's past."

The third and fourth cards, The Foreigner and The Model Minority, kind of come together in a way that they tackle the start of my new life in a new country. A lot of the themes discussed in class can be found in these two poems as I relay my experiences being labeled as a "forever foreigner" by my peers in the way they interacted with me as if there will always be a barrier between us i.e the fact that I am Asian. Furthermore, the model minority myth was very much prevalent in my high school years, and it served as a huge conflict with my confidence in terms of academic success — not fully believing the efforts I put into studying if I am being regarded as "smart" because it's coded in my ethnicity to be that way, or so the people around me said.

The last two cards, The Migrant and The Daughter, are somewhat portrayed as my closure to these hardships I have experienced setting foot onto a whole new environment, as well as the future challenges I may have to face as I continue being exposed to different people and areas of this world. This strongly relates to the Asian American experience overall where we have this never ending journey of finding our lost identities within the spaces we fit ourselves into. Sometimes, those spaces may be dominated by the whites, other minorities, or even our own and it is solely our duty to navigate carefully and with bravery. I borrowed a quote found on the back of The Migrant card which resonated strongly to me, "Do not fear motion, it will transform you."

Last but not the least, I incorporated two poems written in Tagalog but also translated in English as the introduction and the conclusion for the project. I think it adds a more genuine and raw touch to the overall aesthetic of the creative project as it connects me to my roots and my ability of knowing my native tongue still. All in all, the overarching theme of my project can be summarized to one word: home — I thought that creating a story of poems can help me express the most relevant events in my life leading up to where I am today, and I believe "home" is something us Asian Americans are also trying to understand for ourselves.

Link to the Spoken Word Audio:

<https://soundcloud.com/softsighs/spoken-word-poetry-for-asam-51-final-jelicka-gatus/s-4LrWJ>

