

FIVE POEMS

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About the Author

Marty R. Nevada is a Creative Writing major at Ateneo de Manila University, with minor degrees in Education and in Korean Studies. Her work has been published in *Heights* and various collective zines in the Philippines. She was a fellow for poetry during the 24th Ateneo Heights Writers Workshop. She was also a recipient of the Loyola Schools Awards for the Arts in 2020.

HOW TO TAKE PICTURES ON SESSION RD.

after "Session Road" by Butch Perez

The hike up Session Road is special for any man
who wants it to be. This is how a father tries
to find love and make it work or why mother loves
the cadets and Country Club boys more, or so
he thinks. The Pines father, before the Cathedral father,
parks his car by McDonald's on a quiet Good Friday
father. A pocket-sized pouch of pot from a bush to calm
him down when the kids are crying. Whiskey and a cunt
singing live and beautiful, she sounds sweeter than aspens
and his youngest daughter begging for a Happy Meal.
For a bit of pity, not hush money. For him to just stop
the next day when he forcefully spoons his daughters
with care on the stained sheets that bear the same scent as
the trees. The trees that students would hate-fuck against
to learn where babies shouldn't be coming from.
Where leaving used condoms feels cleaner than father
smashing another bottle. Than Hill Station steak
going cold as mother waits for him to put his giant
phone down. Than non-apologies only when convenient.
This is the father with music friends who remember
what his kids look like better than he can drunk,
or sober when he drives. He knows the name of his wife
if she were polite enough to smile. But this road makes them
walk. He likes the rickety stride downhill where he can
watch his girls. Freeze on the other side. Father makes sure
to take pictures of them running; I go so quickly.

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT

When the yellow light doesn't work. When there is no
such thing as slow. When there is no time to see because
the mirror fogs up with steam. When the eczema darkens.
When *Chicken Soup* gathers dust. When there is joy
in missing out. When teeth stain. When sweet pea smells
repulsive. When hunger is not the noise the stomach
makes, but a miracle. When a slap on the face is the best
reward. When pantyliners aren't enough. When crumbs
at the corner of the mouth suffice. When what gets
you here will never get you there. When puberty is missed.
When blankets are wrinkled. When pill splitters mean
order and precision. When waiting is too much. When tea
goes cold. When doormats are favorable. When minnows
start to look big. When cartoon reruns are for weeping. When
candle wax runs out. When scraping the brain seems like
an option. When Angel's Breath is for bathing. When bikes
sound like beasts of the wild. When emails feel like threats.
When every lover leaves. When being is a nightmare. When
any man who affirms is a father. When blood extractions
spark happiness. When grocery shopping brings out the
worst in people. When sunsets are blinding. When
poems are for dinner. When friends are absent so
store-bought ones are fine. When there is nothing more
comforting than a cab ride with a stranger. When pajamas
are casual wear. When walking requires effort. When siblings
scream in the morning. When the taste of water is forgotten.
When staring is a blur. When paperweights resist.

TO WAKE UP

In the morning, it means structure. It means
I will let the baby down the hall wail with the door
open. It means the white couple next door can
share the elevator with me and do whatever the
fuck they want. Today, the black tea I make is
deceivingly medicinal, so I can stay in and sweat
out my new fever. I take to the couch again and
set three alarms, fifteen minutes apart. The first
is a nudge. The second means well. The third says
not today. I look at my throw pillows and feel bad
that they've flattened out, but they're yellow and
anyway, yellow makes things bigger without trying.
I think about art, how it doesn't move me anymore;
how the Luz on my wall is a print. It says *I am*
a fraud. I say *you are a warm body*. I get up—finally—
to straighten the frame. It's the least I could do.

I GIVE MY ANXIETY A NAME

because my therapist tells me to do it,
says it might help me keep it at bay, so I
name her Cracker—snap in uneven
halves and chew and melt and swallow—
sometimes I say *Cracker go away* and she
does until I'm sick to my stomach trying
to swallow every damn time, until I
remember that goldfish can swallow too,
like the time I killed three of them by
feeding them cheese—and did you know
that cheese and crackers go well together—
a memory I wish I never unearthed, see,
now my baby brother keeps six goldfish
at home and I can never look at them
because I'd imagine they'll die just the same,
perhaps on the day my brother starts
losing his little milk teeth, wishing the fish
were just cheese crackers to melt in the mouth,
gargle with milk, throw up and spit down
the toilet when the flavor is all gone.

AMPHIBIAN VARIATIONS

I once dreamt about being plagued by frogs. I was lying by a pond when they came, until one landed on me, springing into my mouth. I didn't resist it. I let it breathe inside of me, hoping that my throat would stretch out too.

*

The legs are the hardest to swallow.

*

When a girl asks why one frog is on top of another, tell her that it is love.

*

I can sleep at night knowing that the frogs are out there, killing mosquitos. The slick digestion, the swiftest of sensations, lick my sores into a lullaby.

*

How do I stick my tongue out far enough to reach you?

*

I want to blow up and give birth to little tadpoles. Out from my navel, little swimming things. I want to look at them and insist that they have my eyes. I will raise them and they will grow faster than I swallowed their father.

*

My lover shows me pictures of speckled frogs dressed in wizard costumes. The body makes magic, he declares, just like this. I say maybe as he rips up my stockings.

*

On television, the frogs eat other frogs to excess. This is ownership, this is nature.

*

I have heard that frogs taste like chicken. I would imagine that they are harder to catch.

*

It never occurred to me how Kermit the Frog never controlled his own body. His arms flail only when another wills it. All I see are rainbows, fake felt hands strumming down a banjo.

*

At sixteen, I cut a frog open and took its heart. As the frog laid etherized, I kept the heart in a Stik-O jar, palpitated and quaked, and called it forever.

*

Outside my house, a frog lays flat on the pavement as roadkill. I call it a miracle—it reeks of bubbling champagne.

*

My slimy sons and daughters, amphibian variations of my body, may you croak louder than I ever could.