REQUIEM

Rodrigo Dela Peña, Jr.
igordelapena@gmail.com

About the Author
A recipient of the Palanca Award for Poetry this year, Rodrigo Dela Peña Jr. has been a fellow for various national writers workshops in the Philippines. His poems have been published in the Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, Kartika Review: An Asian American Journal, The Guardian, and other anthologies and journals. He has been working in Singapore since 2011 as a marketing professional.
FATHER IN THE HOSPITAL

And of the body’s
   pain   Does it hurt
      here   Here

The nurse’s ministrations
   holding forth   Quells
      the growing

in your cells   Not
   the spread
      but the burn

The brunt of it   Mutated
   DNA replicating again
      Again

Until cancer
   Perfects itself
      in your body   How

many weeks   Or days
   left is a question
      the prognosis has

no answer to   Except
   maybe tomorrow
      The next day

The last day
   How long   How does it matter
      amidst the stale air

The commingled smell
   of urine and alcohol   Door
      swiveling on hinges

A routine check
   every quarter hour   Dose
      of morphine
to let your mind slip
    away into the bottom
    of the sea where you do

not resurface And your eyes
    once burning defiant
    now dim glaze over

The gleam
    the pulse of light
    through the window

come evening
    O astonishment
    What lament
INVENTORY

Four IV drips, two piercing each bony arm.

Eight doctors: a pulmonologist who saw the carcinoma in his right lung, a cardiothoracic surgeon who removed it, an oncologist, an anesthesiologist, a cardiologist, a pathologist, a hematologist, an otolaryngologist.

Three meals and two snacks, delivered like clockwork, never eaten. Two blood extractions per day.

Three sisters who crossed the Pacific, jetlagged, to see their brother, the only one among them who remained.

Three sons who all left his house, the separate threads of their lives wound together in this room. One dutiful wife who stayed, whom he pained and caressed over and over, when he still had the strength. Father’s eyes flooded with morning’s light.

One breath: sixty two years, six months.
REQUIEM

Dear namesake  Beloved father  Senior
and signatory  Dear father gone and never
to be seen again  Dearly departed  Dear Mister
Dear miser  Prodigal father whose voice

silenced everyone at the dining table
Ruler of our home's tiny fiefdom  Dear body

in a coffin  Recipient of a letter
you will never read  Dear heart harvested

from the chest cavity  Look what has become
of you  Father most feared  Proof of the world's

abiding trick  Now you see him  Now
you don't  Dear missing addressee  Engineer

and custodian of failed fever dreams  Dear
necessary loss  Finally, I have my sorrow

Nemesis and tormentor  What else
is there to say  Dear father  Dear absence
WIDOWHOOD

There is nothing urgent to do. What a luxury it is to linger instead of stumbling out of bed and putting the kettle on the stove, the interim space before the shrill whistle of boiling water.

* 

Padding to the kitchen, she remembers how it was once rich with the smell of bile, the vital ingredient for a breakfast stew of carabao meat and innards.

* 

Every summer, her bougainvilleas in the yard burst with purple-pink sprays, gold, white blooms veined with faint green streaks--the shrubs growing more flamboyant as water became scarce.

* 

In her former life—but she cannot think of it that way. She remains who she was: still the same woman tending her garden, walking to the market, getting a manicure. But days pass slowly, the hours almost inert.

* 

Susurrus of wind by dusk. She gathers her clothes dried by the sun, light as cocoons, and folds them in a basket, ready for ironing.

* 

At night, the bed is suddenly too large, an ocean she drowns in when she sleeps.
NOW THAT MY FATHER IS GONE, I SEE HIM

everywhere: the faces of strangers on the streets,
passengers on buses and trains during rush hour,
his eyes rheumy and jaundiced, his gaze faraway
as though looking into a future where he would
have disappeared, I hear the rasp of his voice in snatches
of conversation, the drill of steel on concrete,
the gravity of his silence, I feel his presence
in rooms, in trees shedding their leaves, brown and crinkled
as his skin, the swoop and swerve of birds in unison,
the breathless moment when the sun burnishes the sky
before the world falls into darkness.
CHRYSALIS

From the Greek word *khrysos*, meaning gold, the pupa's metallic sheen a whispered hint of the brilliance that lies within. They dangle from stems, indifferent to fruits about to ripen, the sudden gust of wind. By what design lodged deep in its cells does the cocoon know when or how to finally emerge from hiding?

I shouldn't see such things as metaphor, how all of us are transmuted from one form to another, the body discarded so that the soul might quiver and break free.

But there—I just said it, those in-between insects becoming more than just pendants in the foliage. Dear Father, you who have been silent in your death, forgive me if everything I wanted to tell you is cloaked in verse, silky web spun around my skin, pulsing, brocaded. Tell me what to find in a sea of constellations. Tell me how it is, how to peel off that gilded husk of what you once were, crossing the threshold where wings unfurl and flutter, even create a storm.