

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.