

## BAMBOO GIRL:

For Fennie Rosales Casocot

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### About the Author

Ian Rosales Casocot is a novelist and teaches film, literature, and creative writing in Silliman University in Dumaguete City. He has won the Palanca Award several times, and has also won the NVM Gonzalez Prize, a PBBY Salanga Writers Prize, and the FullyBooked/Neil Gaiman Philippine Graphic/Fiction Prize for his fiction. His books include *FutureShock Prose: An Anthology of Young Writers and New Literatures* (Silliman Press, 2002), *Old Movies and Other Stories* (NCCA, 2005), *Beautiful Accidents: Stories* (University of the Philippines Press, 2011), *Heartbreak & Magic: Stories of Fantasy and Horror* (Anvil, 2011), and *Inday Goes About Her Day* (Locsin Books, 2012). In 2008, his novel *Sugar Land* was longlisted in the Man Asian Literary Prize, the biggest prize for the novel in English in Asia. He was Writer-in-Residence for the International Writers Program of the University of Iowa in the United States in 2010. He is currently the Coordinator of the Edilberto and Edith Tiempo Creative Writing Center.

BEFORE MY MOTHER was Fennie and before my aunt was Fannie, they were first “Ceferina” and “Epefania”—names of such old-fashioned import that my more metropolitan aunt, my mother’s older sister, was moved to doctoring the documents of their births to give them easier-sounding names, airy ones that seemed more perfectly attuned to the ways of the New Republic—more modern and reflecting the twang of Hollywood glamour. What was airier than Fannie? What was more modern than Fennie?

World War II was long over and the Americans were mostly gone—and Tita Fannie must have thought, “This is our chance to give ourselves new lives!” For her, that meant giving herself and her younger sister new names to coincide with new times, and consequently perhaps leapfrog from the poverty they knew in their little town.

She had always known that naming had the power to transform, and in the madness of the new republic coming into its own in the early 1950s, transformation was vital like it was everywhere else. It was a key to the divergent fates of young women in stagnant little towns spread across the archipelago. You transformed, and the whole world could become your oyster. Or you didn’t, and you remained fixed in a small life without trajectory, making do with the cold fate of being a *probinsyana* girl.

For Mother, it changed many things; it can rightfully be said that the real beginnings of my mother’s life was the erasure of this older name and everything old that was attached to it. She must have also known that naming is a thing of subtle power. It contains the secret of the divine. *In the beginning*, after all, *was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Still no one ever truly escapes the past or the palimpsest of old names, and when Mother finally learned to tell her own tale apart from the machinations or the dictates of an older sister, her story gushed forth to me—her captive confidant—like a long-unreleased torrent of want.

She was 75 when she began to do journeys of recollection with me. “This is my story,” she would tell me over and over again when I was in the mood of listening to her stories of old friends, of old lives, and of old circumstances. The details were labyrinthine, but she kept such tight possession of the unraveling of her life story.

I suppose that must be so. We who are able to tell our own stories own the narrative. Silence is not history.

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ONE OF MOTHER'S first memories is of being told by a spinster aunt, Mama Mediong (who had become their surrogate caregiver), that she has never had a mother. Her Mama Mediong's alternative birth story was pure fantasy: Ceferina and Epefania had come to the family from the *liki sa kawayan*, the crack of a bamboo, gifts of some benevolent *diwata* living in the magnificent mango tree near their old house in Tolong, the old name of Bayawan, the town at the southern tip of Negros Island. Mother never doubted the story even when—years later—the tale seemed positively borrowed from the popular legend of every Filipino's collective mythical origins. The familiarity only bolstered her personal claim to it.

Mythology is a story of origins, among other things. The Bisaya loved to tell the story of the first man and woman in the world, born in the stretches of the primordial Visayan seas. In that story, there once was a bird of prey tired from being unable to rest from the endlessness of flying between the firmaments: the heavens above and the waters below. But he was crafty and took himself to the private counsel of the god of the sky and later on the god of the sea. Manipulating both of them into anger, and then eventually into quarrel—which resulted to a mighty skirmish that birthed the lands—the bird finally found itself resting on a piece of earth among the other rocks and islands thrown into the sea in the aftermath of battle. While it rested, a length of bamboo with two nodes washed up on shore, hitting the feet of the bird. The maddened bird pounced on the bamboo and began to peck hard at it, eventually splitting it into two. To the bird's surprise, he found a sleeping creature in the hollow of the first node, and from out the other stepped out another creature with supple limbs and flowing hair. This was Silalak and Sikabay, the first man and woman upon the world.

Ceferina and Epefania were Sikabay's children, so to speak.

Her Mama Mediong must have meant the story as a harmless joke, Mother would later tell me. Perhaps it was a convenient tall tale, manufactured on the quick to shoo away a much-too inquisitive niece, the child of Mediong's dead older sister Genoveva.

Except that Mother of course took the tale quite seriously, her childhood naïveté pulsing through the fabrication, enough to believe that she was indeed literally a “bamboo child.” Sometimes I'd humor her by pushing it to the realm of the metaphorical—that perhaps her Mama Mediong meant she was “pliant as a bamboo,” for example, someone able to withstand with graceful dancing all the gales of life. Sometimes I'd tell her what was perhaps closest to the truth: that this story was a spinster aunt's fanciful fabrication, stolen indeed from a popular legend.

She would smile at these attempts of mine, but the look that she would give me spelled out what she truly believed.

Such must have been the depths of her unshakable need to know where she had come from—enough to give as reason to why she was different from her playmates who all had complete families. They had mothers and fathers, for one thing. She only had doting aunts, four of them, and elderly grandparents. She didn't know the classroom retelling of Silalak and Sikabay's story into Malakas and Maganda. She had no chances, even for somebody that young, to listen to and get to know the oft-told tales and legends. "We were a poor family," Mother would recall. "Much too superstitious. Everybody was too busy trying to make sure there was food on the table when meal times came around. We had no time for silly stories." Nor time, it would seem, for the vagaries of childhood.

Mother could not recall how old she was exactly when she was told this particular story of bamboo origins, only that it was the middle of the Second World War, and everything was in a protracted state of chaos, fear, and utter boredom.

It was around that time when the family—which consisted of their maternal grandparents, Lola Valentina (or Intin) and Lolo Benito, and their aunts and uncles—felt it was necessary to evacuate their old house in the middle of the *poblacion* of what was then New Tolong town (now Bayawan City) somewhere down Negros Oriental. The guerillas had just killed Yoshi, the Japanese resident of the town who had acted as go-between for the invading Japanese army. The town folk were quite sure the Japanese were coming back very soon to retaliate, and perhaps even resort to annihilating the entire town for the assassination.

Lolo Benito, according to the story, decided the family must pack up and go. It was nighttime when they made the move, and the air was thick with much suspense and fear. But Mother remembered taking care to observe the many thickets of bamboo she came across on that evacuation, examining each hollow sprout closely as they passed. While everybody else in her company crouched in the dark, hoping no Japanese soldier could see them as they made their way to what they had supposed to be the safety of a faraway place, she eyed every bamboo node she saw and hoped for answers.

Years later, she would realize that their "evacuation" was a journey of dismissible distance. They had thought they had crossed miles and miles of land, away from the war sure to erupt in settled places, but they were barely gone: they had walked only a few kilometers from where they started in the *poblacion*. "We never really evacuated Bayawan," she said, laughing. "We merely moved a few trees away, to

Punong, which was beside the sea, and we thought the nearby woods were the jungles of the distant mountains.”

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IT TOOK ME a long time to listen to my mother’s story simply because, like most children, I was paralyzed from entertaining the very idea that my parents were once people who had lives that did not involve any of us children.

It was enough, it would seem, to consider only the woman who was wife to the father I knew, who catered to all my needs or answered (with the decisive discipline of the occasional spanking) my tantrums, and who had been there for all childhood skirmishes, and, sometimes, triumphs.

Some years ago, in a rare streak of familial insight, I started to consider in a rather oblique and unintended manner that this woman must have an inner life I did not know about. We were talking about the concept of Great Love over Sunday dinner, and I had casually asked her, “Ma, did you ever have a crush when you were growing up?”—not exactly expecting a reply. But it turned out she did. I remembered asking myself: *Who is this woman? How come I do not really know anything about her?*

Still, it took me time to finally listen.

I had not wanted to do what she had been egging me to do all those years, that I should listen to her tales and make a suitable fiction from their beautiful chaos, enough to memorialize an existence.

“*Ga*, listen to my story,” she would tell me when she had the chance. “I think my life would make a very interesting book.” I have always thought that such admission was everybody’s common conceit. Each of us is complicit in feeling that the nuances of our lives, convinced of every moment’s originality, would make for great literature. All lives are a book waiting to happen, it would seem. And just like how I often dealt with other people’s advances in telling me of the cinematic possibilities of their own biographies, I did the patronizing tango with my mother, kissed her on the cheek, ate the food she offered on her table, and promised her—*time and again*—that I would certainly find an inch of my week to sit down with her, to listen to her life story, to write about how she came to be. When you are young, you can be capable of such deviousness and hollow promises.

It would take a few more years before it occurred to me, in a moment of stray consideration, that my mother was in fact getting old, and that I had only known a slight aspect of her existence: as doting mother, and as devoted wife to my father. Still, I must admit that it was a small biography that felt comfortable enough to me—but all storytellers know that there are many sides to a tale. Mother's story, I felt, had intricacies and revelations that could even shed light on my own life.

I stumbled on this truth when Lola Mediong, my mother's maternal aunt and the originator of the bamboo story had her last bad fall. A spinster, she had come to live with us after my family got wind of unflattering reports that she was drinking away her profits from making *achara* (pickled papaya strips) in Bayawan. She was out-drinking the worst *tuba* drinkers in town, and regularly stumbled on her way to some ramshackle hut that housed her. When we sent for her to live in Dumaguete City, she was a lucid woman in her 80s who demanded a great deal of affection from her *apos*. For the most part, she was the picture of health: she still had her teeth, her eyesight was undiminished by time, and she still had the spunk to demand she be given a household task she could do despite increasingly brittle bones and a wavering sense of balance. Sometimes, that meant she would take to the broom and proceed to sweep the entire house of its dirt—stubbornly brandishing the broom like a talisman despite our efforts to make her feel comfortable with her old age, which usually (and perhaps unfairly) meant settling down in some faded corner and whiling away the rest of the days doing cross-stitch. “You’re getting on with the years,” we told her very patronizingly. “You might have an accident if you keep this up.”

I must also confess that when I was a child, I carried with me—the way most children do—that strange dislike for old skin or old smell; I avoided Lola Mediong's geriatric cajoling and then sometimes also her pleas for me to do the mandated “mano”—cupping her hand to lead to my forehead, a gesture of respect between generations most have found quaint. She also had stories of her life in Bayawan, but nobody was there to listen to her—not me, not anyone of my five brothers, nor any of my cousins, the nine sons and daughters of my mother's sister, Tita Fannie.

In hindsight, I realize that we should have been more welcoming of her stories, because later on, when we became desperate to learn more about the history of my maternal family, Lola Mediong—our last link to that unexplored past then—could no longer be counted on to give a straightforward narrative. She had her last bad fall when she took to her trusty broom to swirl away cobwebs in one corner of the house and broke her leg when the chair she was standing on gave way. Recovery took months, but she was no longer the same Lola Mediong who had the ferocity of tough countrywomen. Somehow, mentally, she had also let go. While she still had some capacity to recognize our faces, the past for her was like broken pottery

that she could no longer make sense of, nor try to put back together into a cohesive narrative. Whenever I'd ask her a question, I'd get answers that were stuck in some roundabout that had become her inner world. "Lola," I'd ask, "what did you mean when you used to call mother's father a *buyong*? What is a *buyong*?" (Later, I learned a "buyong" meant a wandering stranger one must be wary about.)

Lola Mediong would give me the worst kind of quizzical look possible, as if she was trying so hard to understand what I meant by my question. "Dugong?" she would ask.

"No, lola, *buyong*."

"*Butong*."

I would finally move to give half a shout, "*Buyong!*"

This would go on for a few more minutes until I—or somebody else—would finally give up in the quest for the simplest, but most elusive, answer. Like her mind, her stories were gone forever.

Stories, especially real ones—the ones that shape our families, the ones that our fathers and our mothers know to be their sacrosanct biographies—are always a fragile lot. Family stories, often than not, disappear into the void of the disinterest of generations to come. Nobody ever bothers to ask some of the most vital, and the most fascinating, questions anymore. *What was my mother like before she met my father? What did she dream to be? Who was her first love? What was the first movie that she saw? What song made her cry? What curses did she shout the moment I struggled to break free from her womb?* All parents have their inner lives. The tragedy of children is that they do not willingly try to uncover what fascinating stories they may reveal. It was with this conviction that I had resolved to know my mother's story.

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ONCE EACH WEEK for the past years, after waking up from the utter, bright sunniness of most Sunday mornings, I'd make way for the one ritual that governed a life kept busy with the weight of bachelorhood and the demands of a semi-workaholic existence: I'd visit Mother who lived a few blocks up north in Dumaguete from my apartment in Tubod.

We'd have lunch together—sometimes with chicken curry, which was my favorite, and sometimes with Korean barbecue she'd make from scratch. Sometimes, she'd prepare *pako* salad, made from fern and marinated in coconut milk. We'd talk like giddy airheads about the celebrities we'd see on the television, gossip about Piolo Pascual and such and such.

Sometimes we'd scan through old pictures and rummage through her wealth of memories. I soon found out from our Sundays together that she seemed to remember her childhood in Bayawan in a haphazard manner, like dots she made play at connecting. There were many details she could not remember, but a tiny fragment of memory could trigger wild gesticulations and excited storytelling, as a flood of things sprung forth from her like a gushing cataract that sometimes I had to suggest narrative restraint. "Ma," I'd tell her, "you're not helping me here. I'm trying to reconstruct your past, and you're not helping me if you gush off like that." She'd only laugh, but she'd also try calming herself down and proceed to obey my resolute efforts to streamline what came from her memory.

I listened to her, and I felt that her past was a completely different country: it had a different smell, a different look, and a different feel. The grammar of it was different, the cartography completely unfamiliar. What were for her ordinary relics of an old childhood—details of dishes and pots, houses and old dirt roads, names of people totally unknown to me—were things I fought to give a name, or a face, or a detailed rendering, so that I, too, could appreciate just how they had become so much a part of my mother's young life. She'd talked about a *batirol* from childhood, for example, and I'd find myself asking, "What's a *batirol*?"

She laughed at my modern-day ignorance. "It's a thing for making *tsokolate*, which was my Lola Intin's favorite beverage. It's a clay jar with a long neck, and a curved handle. It has a hole near the top from which a *bolanyo* could come through, and Lola Intin would stir the chocolate tablets with it in till the mixture would become thick, good enough for drinking."

I then asked her to sketch what a *batirol* looked like.

Such was how we learned to come to know the past.

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MY VISITS TO Mother were something I surprisingly found myself looking forward to every week. Perhaps, I told myself in the beginning, this was a sign of years slowly edging off the brackets of youth. I was in my early 30s when I started

that project. In the gravity of deepening adulthood, mothers could sometimes become strange sources of comfort. We shared the same birthday, too, Mother and I—August 17—and this added to a connection between us, and perhaps we knew we were yoked not just by flesh and blood, but also by the reckoning of our shared stars.

She lived in our family house somewhere in Piapi, bordering the teacher's village near Bantayan, in a huge compound the parameters of which used to be lined with trees. Now only the coconut trees remain, but only ever devoid of their fruit, because my older brother had complained to the neighbors that the falling coconuts were wreaking havoc on our property. It is a big house, a two-storey affair that looks imposing in front and yet is actually slim when viewed from the sides. The house has a veranda, and overlooks a garden Mother grew from the sheer effort of her geriatric hands; it was still something she watered every morning after breakfast and prayers. The centerpiece of it was a modest bamboo grove in one corner, growing freely from rich soil, its shoots a constant source of salad for Mother's dining table.

On the Sundays that I'd be there, her morning gave way to preparing something delicious for lunch for her youngest son; she'd water the garden only when she came home in the afternoon while I'd be in the back veranda snoozing in the bamboo divan under the late sun, after she had made her weekly visits to the local provincial hospital where she had made it her mission to pray over the sick—this was something she had been doing every Sunday since as far back as I could remember. This should make her a saint

Sometimes I think it is only *now*, in this present, that I am learning to appreciate Mother more. Adulthood, edging close to middle age, gives you that ability: now that I have grown up and “flown the nest,” so to speak, it is much easier to see her as being more than just the provider for the most basic of needs I had when I was growing up. I have known her all my life as the woman who fought so many battles just to provide six growing boys three square meals every single day. Now that the battle has largely been won, she has mellowed—and has grown slightly plump—in her twilight years.

I told her that: that her senior years had made her comfortably plump.

“But I was always a skinny child,” she remembered.

Sickly would be the word. Her ancient aunts had a word for it—“masusuylo,” and said she had always been *that* ever since she was three years old. Her scalp, it seemed, was festering constantly with small sores, and she had spent an entire year

suffering from an extreme case of *bo-og* in her ear—which might explain why she had a hard time hearing these days.

Looking back, she understood why she was the sickly sort: she and her sister grew up incredibly poor, in noble squalor that was of course quite normal in the far-flung provinces in the earliest years of the 19th century. “And yet, I don’t remember thinking we were ever poor,” she said. “Only now when I look back to the past do I find some of the things that we did—or many of the things that surrounded us—to be the very picture of poverty.” Childhood then, it seemed, was perfectly capable of masking everything in a glow of innocence, even fun.

Despite the hardship, the house they lived in—built by the very hands of their Lolo Benito Malasarte—was more than large enough for the everyday smallness of New Tolong. The house in the *poblacion* was a big wooden square on stilts, the main floor accessible only by boards of hardwood germelina nailed together in haphazard fashion to make for a staircase. Downstairs, on dirt grounds, their pigs and chickens milled about. Upstairs, the front door led to a kitchen that had seen better days, a corner of it sagging from the rot of water where they would wash their dishes (and sometimes, themselves). Against the wall, and right next to the makeshift sink, they kept their *dapog*, a tableau of hardened ash that housed their cooking. To the immediate left was the *komedor*—the dining room. Farther on, there was a raised bar along which several clay jars (called a *tadjao*) of water were kept. And farther on there was the small sala consisting mostly of an old wooden round table, and then there were the bedrooms—three of them—that housed a brood of seven, plus Lolo Benito and Lola Valentina. There were, in succession of uncles and aunts, Alfredo (more popularly known as Piding), Genoveva (Mother’s mother), Amadeo (Ining), Remedios (Mediong), Beatrice, and Ambrosio (Dodong). Then there were, of course, Epefania—my aunt—and my mother, Ceferina.

She remembered most the games they played as children—*patintero*, of course, and *tubig-tubig*, and *lantay-lantay*, names of exotic and ancient play lost to me now except for some vague idea that these were games played under the heat of the sun, in the dirtied frenzy of the outdoors.

“We loved playing outside,” mother recalled—but the aunts, because it always was in the very nature of adults to frown upon the frolic of children, would always admonish them to come early, to “stop all the shenanigans,” lest Old Tiyong would come and shanghai them to some secret abode where bad things happened. From the open window from which Lola Beatrice and Lola Mediong would shell their corn for the evening meal, they would call out to the playing children, “*Hoy, pauli na mo! Kuhaon mo karon ni Tiyong!*”

And the girls would scramble up the staircase, sometimes scraping the skin of their knees in their nervous flight, too unsophisticated to even think that Old Tiyong was nothing more than the bearded, and short, old man who went around town selling *kwitis*, an inferior kind of fireworks that produced only the strangest wee bit of spark that passed for fire.

Sometimes, they played house—using the wooden upstairs furniture, upturning them to create “rooms” and draping them with curtains or blankets to create “roofs”—and pretended they had prepared a banquet. Tita Fannie would pretend to spoon-feed Mother generous helpings of the imaginary food, making clucking sounds all the way.

When they did get their treats, these often consisted of *dulce de lemon*, which cost 1 centavo each. Sometimes, there was coconut candy. And when tougher times came, they sated themselves with the small fruits they plucked from the *maria-maria* shrub (“it tasted like *marang*,” mother claimed), or even the *udlot sa manga*. Mother sometimes had to make-do by secretly creeping to the kitchen where she would climb the small nubs in the wall to get to the hanging clay *batirol* where her Lola Intin made her *tsokolate*. Largely left unwashed, its sides often became thickened by deposits of chocolate and *refinado* sugar, over which mother, as a young girl, would scrape in a finger and lick out the chocolate. “I became too greedy one day,” she says, “and fell to the *dapog*. I still have the scars from all those chocolate cravings.” And then, in better times, there was bread—especially a type they called “baki,” which meant frog. There was also *kalamay*, and *puto*, and *budbud*, and sometimes *tira-tira*.

Her elder sister’s own game plan for treats was remarkable for its original deviousness. Before the end of each day, the young Epefania would be sent by Lola Intin to buy the kerosene to light the evening’s lamps, and for the tiny amount they needed for the night’s illumination, she was usually given five centavos. At Dada Senit’s *sari-sari* store, little Epefania would then tell the slim and *mestiza* shopkeeper—whose husband was the secretary of the town mayor—that she needed kerosene worth only four centavos, with the last centavo to be spent on bubble gum. “Kengkoy was the brand of bubble gum we went crazy for then,” Mother recalled. Coming home, her elder sister would surrender the container with the kerosene to their waiting grandmother, and then would hurry to the bedroom where she would hide in the *kaban* meant to store their pillows, and in the darkness of the wooden box proceed to enjoy, by her lonesome, her contraband sweets. In the kitchen, of course, my mother would do her climbing to get to the chocolate-flavored *batirol*. Such, it seemed, was the grammar of small desires in the olden days.

Meal-time was never a grand affair: there was always *linugaw*—a kind of rice congee—on the table every night, made to taste with a pinch or two of rock salts. On better days, there was rice and yellow ripe bananas. Lunch was mostly fish or chicken. Sometimes there was *pos-pas*. And they had to eat without much complaint. “When we didn’t like what was there to eat,” mother says, “Mama Mediong would pinch us, or *kuhiton mi ug tukog*, or scare us that an *abat* was right outside waiting to eat us if we didn’t clear our plates soon. *Ni-a na pud, dili mo nganga*, she would say.”

Lola Intin usually cooked, while their Mama Mediong washed and ironed the clothes. Their Mama Beatrice, being the artistic type, would help the young girls make cut-out dolls.

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SOME TIME LATER, I’d ask Tita Fannie her own memory of their childhood, and I found that there was no bamboo story to keep her guessing about their origins. She knew there was a death in the family, although for a four-year old, the hushed talk of the adults around her never penetrated enough to make her realize it was her mother they were talking about.

“It was 1934. I was lying down one night to sleep,” Tita Fannie told me, when she had joined my mother for one of our Sunday spells, “and I remembered there were so many visitors in the house. I did not feel anything. I had no consciousness of anything else, except my want for sleep.” She was lying on the brown *buli banig* she shared with her sister, and remembered that the mat had felt scratchy against her skin. The pillows, filled with local cotton or *doldol*, felt hard. She was half awake when someone mentioned Genoveva dying.

“How did she die?” I asked.

“She was bleeding,” Tita Fannie said. “We don’t know exactly how she died. Only that she had a hemorrhage of sorts, but all we got from our aunts and uncles were lies, or at best, half-truths we didn’t care about.”

Years later, she would be told several versions of that night. How their mother—a beautiful, chinky-eyed young woman with long hair whom everybody called Bebang—had watched herself bleed to death on a rocking chair, her blood gushing out of a hole cut in the seat, down to the *palanggana* below. It was a morbid tale; what it made it worse was that their mother Bebang had been pregnant for four months. The first stories they were told were of the supernatural sort: how an

*engkanto* had fallen in love with her because she had the most beautiful long black hair in town. One of Bebang's chores then was to gather twigs for fuel from around an old mango tree near their house. She had stayed too long once, and the tree's *engkanto* had come to claim her.

"She had died giving birth to a stillborn son, our brother," Tita Fannie finally said. "After she died, our father disappeared. We never heard from him again."

It took a few more years for me to ask Mother if she had reconsidered her bamboo story, knowing what I now knew about my great-grandparents. It was growing late in the Sunday afternoon, and all I could see on her face was an old yearning coming back: it was the face of a child who had known no mother or father, and had only known a fantastic tale of how she came to *be*.

My mother was already 80-years-old then. And for her, this and other old stories that she had kept were the last souvenirs from a childhood she held in a fragile embrace: it was a secret garden for her, the place where her forgotten memories thrived and she had the only key to its locked gates, and here, in these stories, she became that child again, looking at that mythical bamboo, trying to ascertain her own origins, and trying to find her own place in the increasingly confusing world of too much reality, too much forgetfulness.

"We make our choices in the stories of our lives that we tell," she finally told me. "I prefer the bamboo, *ga*."

I quietly understood what she had to say, and in the growing bathing of orange of the sunset that embraced us, I turned to her to kiss her goodnight, but she was already looking far away, gently staring at the bamboo grove in her garden, perhaps willing it to share its secrets, perhaps longing for a return to some mythical origin perhaps understanding finally and fully what it meant to have history.