

FIVE POEMS

Marty R. Nevada
Ateneo de Manila University
amrnevada@gmail.com

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 deceptively 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.