The Color of Death
and Other Poems

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The Color of Death

Black is not the color of death—
it is fresher than that.
It does not reek of disintegration,
and it does not decompose. It composes
itself over and over again.
Eternal as the ritual of falling leaves—
a silent continuation of a cycle.

Its color is that of a descending sun,
marking an ephemeral close.
A preparation for a perforation of the liver.
Death is a vulture that religiously comes
to pierce and puncture a body
that has come to heal itself daily.

Orange

I push the door open, and I let him in.
A body that is made up of a dining table,
Six chairs, a wall clock, and an olive sofa.
Of course, there is a window.
Light seeps in through its curtains
And makes its way to the white walls.
Of course, the warm light is accepted with grace
and a kind of hunger familiar to cold cements alone.
Now, fertile hues permeate the room.
Outside, the neighborhood is warm
With the sour glow of the setting sun.
The olive sofa has now become a womb,
cradling two bodies.
And his exquisite torso is bathed
In orange light. I begin to understand
How luscious is the citrus of a simple afternoon.
I begin to understand that ripe things
Are not always sweet but that they swell
With fecund calmness, bursting with fresh flesh.

Shadow Play

(After watching Umaaraw, Umuulan, Kinakasal ang Tikbalang)

The moon rears a language
   of shadows—
a system of shedding skins.
   It is a belly that conceives
crooked creatures and curves of different kinds.

It speaks
   of constant mutation
and alterations.

   Layering
dimensions
deforming contours of a dog
to make way for a woman dancing in a state of frenzy.

   Collapsing cul-de-sac
to open a passage
that leads to a plush domain.
   A realm where Capres and Duwendes
reside to hide
and heed the summons of shapeshifting.
Immigrant

I dance every night
to summon the limbs that I have lost.
Swaying to a distant humming.
The margins of my hips drift
beyond the borders of being
here and moving forward.
My feet follow a rhythmic stomp
as I tread upon this foreign soil
that has clung to my toes.
My arms extend to reach for the limbs
tangled up in a tree outside my old house.
Memory of the house where I grew up
entangled with the rest of my childhood.
I am but a branch undulating
to the winds that bite men
as they head home.

Remnants of a Summer

I.

Visiting province after province,
listening to sea wave after sea wave,
learning languages and tasting delicacies
cooked with keenness.
Feeling fabrics in flea markets
and riding tricycles of different kinds
only to be reminded of a childhood summer
in our little pueblo and the sound of the raging river
not too far from our house.
II.
I keep remembering the taste of native chicken
served with fish in tamarind soup
and the sound of Ayo-ayo, Limpyo, and Manga-on
that my tongue was too shy to utter.

III.
Motorcycle rides remind me
of that ride in a habal-habal.
The four of us, Judy, you, me,
and the driver riding a habal-habal.
How I turned pale as the driver
worked his way in the muddy tracks of our steep,
steep mountain.

IV.
The long ride to the flea market
and the equally long ride back home
gave me a headache,
but the sight of my playmates and fireflies
playing hide and seek scared it away.
We kept looking for each other
as the scent of sautéed garlic and onion
from different houses
wafted through the air.
Shouting Taya! to mean I found you.

V.
How the smell of soap lingered in the air
as we crawled inside our mosquito net,
fresh from shower and ready to recite our prayers.
Visitors of Tatay’s little town
finding comfort in tracing the patterns of the banig
and the familiar rose print of my thin blanket.